A Forest Orchid

By Ella Higginson

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AND OTHER STORIES

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BY

ELLA HIGGINSON

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To

MY MOTHER AND MY FATHER

I AM indebted to the publishers of *McClure's*, *Leslie's Weekly*, *The Outlook*, and to the Messrs. S. H. Moore & Company and T. J. Kirkpatrick & Company, for the kind permission to reprint some of the stories in this book.

E. H.

A FOREST ORCHID

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"I don't like the looks of him," said Mrs. Sumas Brown. "I bet he's got the big-head. I never see anybody come out here from Bawston that didn't have it. They all git it took off of 'em in a hurry, though, I notice. What does sech a high-an'-mighty want of a shingle-mill an' loggin'-camp, I'd like to know! Here, Sidonie, let's hull these strawberries."

She sat down and took a pan of berries on her lap. She had the generous pink flesh and the comfortable look generally that come to a woman at fifty if she has not fretted her health away over small cares. There was another Mrs. Brown at the logging-camp, and, as initials were not in high favor, they were known as Mrs. "Soomas" Brown and Mrs. Goshen Brown, from the towns in which they had formerly dwelt.

"I liked him," said Sidonie, sitting down and taking a strawberry in her pale, delicate fingers. "I didn't think he was so bad. He has good eyes, and they are such a beautiful brown."

Sidonie was very different from her mother. She was slender, almost to fragility. Her fig-

ure was round and perfectly poised. She had much brown hair with gold streaks glancing loosely through it. Her eyes were large and earnest and gray. There were blue veins in her temples; but with all her delicacy she had a look of deep strength and self-reliance.

She wore a lawn dress that had faded to a light green which was very becoming to her pale, clear complexion.

"O' course yuh'd like him if I didn't," complained Mrs. Sumas Brown. "It w'u'dn't be *you* if yuh c'u'dn't disagree with a body! I ain't a-goin' to put on any lugs fer him, anyways, if he has bought the mill an' the whole loggin'-camp. He can take what the rest o' the boarders take. Yuh needn't think I'm a-goin' to have my best napkins used up fer him, either. I see yuh a-puttin' one at his plate."

"Mrs. Goshen Brown gives her boarders napkins," said Sidonie, with quiet diplomacy.

"She does!" Mrs. Sumas Brown closed her lips in a scornful expression. "Well, then, Mr. Ethelbert Gilder er Mr. Anybody Else can have a napkin a meal here, if he wants, er six napkins a meal. Mis' Goshen Brown'll have to get up before the chickens if she expects to git ahead o' this old hen. There! Yuh go out an' ring the dinner-bell — the whistle's jest blew."

The Rynearson shingle-mill had been set upon

a creek in a little clearing in the heart of a dense fir and cedar forest. It was a full mile from the Nooksack River; but it was indifferent to rivers. Two narrow steel rails went shining along the edge of the forest, and two others curved gracefully down to the mill itself.

The clearing was not large. Around it circled the dark forest wall, with the railroad cleaving a narrow avenue through on one side and the skid-road on the other; while a wavering line of silver-dappled alders pointed out the way that the creek went.

The Rynearson mill had recently become the Gilder mill.

The Sumas Brown residence was what is known as a "shack." It was larger than most shacks, however, having three bedrooms, a kitchen, and a dining-room. It was made of "shakes," which gave it a picturesque look. It was lined and ceiled with strong, white muslin to prevent the entrance of sawdust.

When Mr. Gilder entered the dining-room, his glance went to the neatly laid table with a bowl of eglantine in the centre; from that to the white walls with wild "hanging-basket" vine trained over them from the little painted cans in which it grew; to the pale drifts of maidenhair fern growing in corners; the wild hop-vines climbing over the open windows.

There was a vase full of scarlet columbine, and another of wild, rose-colored clover.

Then his eyes came with sudden surprise to Sidonie — and went no further.

After supper that evening Mr. Gilder walked around the clearing aimlessly. He had his hands in his pockets and was smoking a cigar. There were at least seventy-five men in the camp, and not one with whom he could have a thought in common. They were assembled in various shacks, playing cards and drinking whiskey.

He walked down to the creek and sat on the bridge, and asked himself if he could endure a year in such a hole, even for the fortune he expected to make. He walked a little way out the skid-road, but the skids were greasy; so he turned and went back in a terrible disgust.

He told himself that he would go to his shack and write to Constance — he expected to marry Constance — and describe the place he was in. She was a sweet and tender woman. She would sympathize with him.

On his way to the shack he passed the sheds, open on one side, where the huge bulls used on the skid-road were resting in their stalls. He paused to look at them.

Something light in the dusk of one of the stalls attracted his glance. It moved and came toward him.

It was Sidonie, in a short, full skirt and high boots.

"I've been in to see the bulls," she said, simply. "I come every night. They all know me, but old Blue's my favorite."

Gilder would have laughed, but something in her voice kept him silent. She stooped and patted the bull gently. He turned his head, breathing heavily, and licked her hand. "His breath is sweet," she said, leaning upon him. "He likes to have me sit on him. I keep this dress just to wear out here. The bull-puncher tells me" — she laughed, softly — "that if I miss coming one night they're so cranky all next day he can't do anything with them."

She came out and stood beside Gilder. The sun was going down over the tops of the trees; it set a fire of reddish gold in the girl's magnificent coils of hair. She stood silently looking at the bulls.

"How do you *endure* this life?" asked Gilder, suddenly recognizing that the girl was above her surroundings and her people. She turned her cool, gray eyes steadily upon him.

"I teach school," she said, "in a funny little log-house on the bank of the Nooksack. It's quite a mile. It's a lovely path — like a narrow gray ribbon — through the deep forest.

Then I help mother Saturdays, and I have Sundays and evenings to myself."

"And these Sundays and evenings? What do you do with them?"

She turned her head with a slow, easy movement; it struck him that it was set upon her slender, beautiful throat like a lily. "I read and study. And there's always the forest."

"It must be very lonely," said Gilder. He was leaning on the bars, looking down on her. His eyes were full of her compelling beauty.

She smiled. "One can't be lonely with the forest at one's door," she said. "Of course the mill and the whole clearing are — "

She stopped, laughing. Gilder's glance followed hers over the unpainted shacks, the ugly mill, the tall, dusty brakes, and the great charred stumps lifting their black forms everywhere to the sunset. Not one thing of beauty — except the one to which his eyes returned with a thrill of pleasure.

"But fifty yards in any direction," she went on, bringing her glance back to his, "and you are in the forest. I don't believe you know what *our* forests are like. They're so deep and dim and still. The moss is like a pale green velvet carpet, and the great trees go up, so straight and close together, two hundred, three hundred feet."

"That is one of your 'boom' stories," he interrupted, with an amused smile.

"It's a true one," she replied, smiling, too, but breathing stilly. "And the sunlight only gets through enough to lie on the moss in tiny, gold shapes. The firs are clocks — they drop a cone for every minute; and when it rains you can hear it sinking into the earth. Pan is *not* dead!" she exclaimed, in a sudden burst of tumultuous passion, striking her palms together. Then a swift, deep color came upon her face, and she was silent.

Gilder would have been amused had he not been so touched. A man who is both touched and amused is interested.

He walked with her to her door. All the windows shone out like brass. The dusty ferns took on a sudden quivering glory of color. Amethyst clouds were breaking apart in the tall tops of the trees. He followed her into the dining-room.

"I'm coming in to see your books," he said.

She hesitated. It was a real blush that came now. "I've not very many," she said; she still stood hesitating. Then she lifted her head with a movement that would have been haughty in any other woman, and walked to a door at one end of the room, he following her, and flung it open.

"This is my study," she said, with the air of a queen. "No one has ever been in here. It's not arranged for visitors; but you may come in."

"Thank you," he replied, entering.

It was a tiny room, not more than eight feet square. The floor was covered with blue-striped matting. There was one small window, curtained with some thin blue stuff. Delicate vines were outlined against it. The walls were lined with books. In the centre of the room was a small home-made table, painted white. A wooden chair, also painted white, was drawn close to it.

Gilder walked about the room, looking at the books. They were all good, but some of them amazed him. He had expected to find Longfellow and Whittier; but he was unprepared for Rossetti, Tennyson, Dante, Milton, Hugo, Eliot, and translations of Virgil and Goethe.

Sidonie sat down and rested her elbows on the table, sinking her chin in her palms. She looked at him steadily as he went about the room; there were burning questions in her eyes. Presently he brought a chair from the dining-room and sat down opposite her.

The table was littered with magazines. A book lay open, with the leaves pressed down.

"You have read all these books?" he asked.

"Many times."

He took another look at the shelves.

"You have read more wisely than most college women. Which, of all these books, is your favorite?"

She laid her hand, palm downward, on the open book. It was the Bible. It was open at the fourth chapter of Solomon's Song.

"I thought you would name Tennyson or Longfellow," he said, after a surprised silence. "Or, perhaps, Rossetti. I certainly expected that you would name a poet."

"There is no poetry like that." She leaned toward him, pressing her hand on the book. There was a fire in her eyes. "There never will be any poets like the men who wrote it. *They* were not afraid."

He was conscious of a deep thrill of exaltation; a sudden shaking loose of low ambitions and a rising to a clearer, higher atmosphere.

He looked intently into her eyes. "Who taught you to feel that?"

"I've felt it ever since I could read. Don't imagine I believe all the Bible! I don't. One must sift and sift to get the gold. You can hear God's voice all through the Bible, if you listen — just as you can hear it when the wind blows through the grass, or the sea comes up the beach. But you have to listen! — listen for yourself! You mustn't trust anybody's ears but your own."

Gilder sat for some moments playing with a pencil and looking at the girl. He was lost in deep thought. At last he said, slowly, half smiling: "I want to ask you one more question. I will promise to ask no more to-night. You have read widely, and formed your own opinions. College women and university women parrot out the opinions and criticisms of their professors as if they were their own. But you have had to rely solely upon yourself. Of all the women you have read about, what one would you rather have been?"

She was silent; her eyes grew larger and darker. Her face was eloquent with rapid and varied thought. Her deep, noiseless breathing spoke of repressed passion — passions, rather — springing to an old and familiar struggle. When she spoke her voice was calm; but he saw that her throat was throbbing.

"Sappho" — her color came and went; "Cleopatra" — the throbbing in her throat quickened; she hesitated; a beautiful shining came upon her face; she uttered softly — "Ruth. Most of all, Mary, the mother of Christ. After her" — there was a light on her face now that made Gilder look at her as one looks at the far, high lights of dawn, rapt, exalted, feeling God behind them — "after her, the Mary Magdalen."

"*The Mary Magdalen!*" he breathed.

"Yes; oh, yes. She is to all women what Christ is to all the world. She is the greatest woman the world has had."

For a little while Mr. Ethelbert Gilder sat speechless before this country girl whom he had offered to teach, and who served her mother's boarders as coolly and as gracefully as she would have given a cup of tea to a visitor; this girl who went nightly to caress a dozen tired bulls in their stalls, and to examine their sides, lest they might have been prodded too deeply during some hard, up-hill pull.

"Now you must go," she said, smiling. "It's ten o'clock."

He went out into the sweet June night. The moon was moving in slow majesty through the trees. The little clearing was beautiful in the soft light. Somehow the place did not seem so unendurable to Gilder as he sat on his front steps, smoking, far into the night, and thinking of the girl whose light shone out through the vines that climbed over her window.

The following day was Sunday. Every one else had breakfasted when Gilder reached the dining-room. He was conscious of a feeling of disappointment when his breakfast was brought in by Mrs. Sumas Brown, instead of Sidonie.

In a few minutes the girl came in. Her face

was glowing; her bright hair was damp with dew and fog.

"I expected to find oceans of flowers in the forest this morning," she said. "But I came upon this one beautiful orchid, and then I desired no others. Beside it all other flowers seem pale and not worth carrying home."

She held toward him a most beautiful specimen of the *Calypso borealis*, an orchid found in deep, damp places in the Washington forests. It was of a rich, rosy purple. Its fragrance was at once ravishing and elusive.

Gilder examined it with delight.

"I found it three miles from here," went on Sidonie, gleefully as a child. "It grows in a dim glen, shut in by dark, old trees, with a golden green moss all over their trunks and over the earth; and long, silver moss hangs from all the branches. There is not a sound in there; even the birds come and look at you and do not sing. Don't you want to go with me some Sunday?"

Mrs. Sumas Brown opened the door.

"Well, good grieve!" she exclaimed. "Where yuh b'en? It's high time you come! D' yuh git any licorish root? I bet yuh fooled the whole mornin' away an' never onct thought o' licorish root!"

"I did forget," said the girl, slowly. The

glow went out of her face. She took the orchid from Gilder and went into her room. He heard the door close between them.

"I never see her beat!" grumbled Mrs. Sumas Brown. "Always a-gittin' her feelin's hurt over nothin'."

Then Gilder fell to thinking seriously of the girl and of her life.

"She is like the orchid," he thought, "that has sprung up in the deep, dark forest and wastes its delicate beauty and fragrance."

Two weeks later Gilder was leaving the dining-room one morning when Sidonie came in like a whirlwind. She was breathing swiftly with excitement.

"Oh, come!" she exclaimed. "There's just time! They're coming! They're bringing up old Ginger!"

She was gone like a flash. Gilder followed her. He had not the faintest surmise as to what or who old Ginger was — it was sufficient for him to know that the girl bade him come.

She sped before him down the skid-road until she reached a curve at the top of a long hill. There she poised on a skid, in a quiver of excitement, and looked back, signalling him to hasten.

He reached her side breathless with his run.

"What is it?"

"It's old Ginger!" she panted. "I've been so afraid I should not be here when they brought him! Oh, look! Isn't it grand? Isn't it worth coming *miles* to see?"

Gilder looked. Twelve splendid bulls were straining up the sloping incline, dragging behind them an immense tree — larger than anything he had ever imagined in the tree line. Several men — hook-tenders, bull-punchers, skid-greasers — ran beside it, greasing the skids, goading the bulls, pushing here and pulling there with cant-hooks. There was much shouting, much creaking of chains, much straining of noble animals and swelling of hot nostrils. The muscles stood out in their backs and sides like ropes; their eyes rolled, their feet slipped and clung and stumbled to new foothold. The blood spurted under sharp, and often cruel, pricks from the steel goads. The huge cedar bulk slid, groaning and creaking, up the skids. The greaser ran ahead of the bulls, stooping constantly to drop splashes of grease on the skids from long wooden paddles.

"They're a-comin'!" he yelled to Sidonie. "Better git out o' the way! Look-ee out there! That end'll fly around an' hit yuh! Hey, miss! Look-ee out there!"

But Sidonie pressed recklessly near, until Gilder, in whose veins some of the girl's enthusiasm was commencing to burn, took a firm hold of her arm and drew her aside. She was trembling with excitement. "Oh, see old Blue!" she cried. "He's the off-wheeler! Isn't he noble?" and she waved her kerchief proudly as the panting brute struggled by.

With a final triumphant effort and plunge the tree was borne to its destination and lay motionless on the skids.

The trembling went suddenly out of the girl. The fire died out of her face. "What a pity!" she said, looking down gravely at the fallen cedar. "Oh, what a pity! And we have been enjoying it! Let us go back."

As they walked along, she looked back regretfully. "Poor old Ginger! He was the king of the forest all these years. Two men lost their lives bringing him down from the skies."

"Ah!" said Gilder, with unconscious condescension. "One doesn't think of a place like this having its tragedies."

"Oh, doesn't one!" flashed out the girl, instantly, with a great scorn. "I know what you think. You think we are clods. You think we are in a *groove!* Let me tell you that you are in a groove, too, — a groove so narrow and so deep that you'll never get out! You have

no joy in nature; you have no joy in yourself; you have no joy in God! You look at a flower or a weed, and you say it's beautiful or ugly, as you think; you look at a noble animal, or a great forest, or a scarlet sunset, and you see nothing but the thing itself! You do not see God in anything; you have no religion. You belong to some church, probably, because your father does, or your mother does, or your great-grandmother did before you were born, and if you were asked what you believe, or what your church believes, you couldn't tell!" Gilder winced. "You have no joy in yourself," went on the girl, passionately. "You can't be alone an hour without being bored. You have to be amused — like a child!"

She sprang up the steps, but Gilder caught her hand and held it, compelling her to turn. She looked down on him under frowning brows. Her face glowed; her eyes flamed with a blue fire. She was most beautiful.

Gilder smiled at her with that tenderness that comes to a man's face when he is beginning to love unconsciously. "You're a bigot," he said, thrilling deliciously as her hand struggled to release itself. "You're very, very terrible, and I'm afraid of you."

Then he let her go. She gave him a fierce look and flashed into the house. He went

away, still smiling. "She's perfect now," he said. "That little spurt of temper has made her perfect."

Mrs. Sumas Brown came into the dining-room and sat down. She was beating butter and sugar together. Sidonie was arranging the table for dinner.

"Fer pity's sake!" exclaimed her mother. "What a little dab o' pickles! 'S that all yuh're a-goin' to put on? 'Sh-h-h! There goes Mis' Goshen Brown by. I wonder what ails 'er. She looked in here sour as swill. I guess she's lost a boarder, an' 's lookin' in here to see 'f we've got him."

It was September. Gilder had not only endured three months in the heart of a Washington forest, but had found them to be the happiest months of his life. He was in love with Sidonie.

Constance was his cousin, and she had promised to marry him. It was a kind of family arrangement. They had a mild, comfortable affection for each other — most comfortable. Gilder, for instance, had never felt murder in his heart while watching Constance waltzing in the arms of some other man. That is the surest test of love. When a man can be indifferent to

that, either his love or his nature is of the milk-and-water sort. Gilder, considering waltzing a bore, was grateful to every man who took Constance off his hands at a ball.

He went to see her regularly; and kissed her dutifully, with much calmness and a certain pleasure. She was a pretty woman, dainty and patrician. But all her kisses distilled into one kiss could not have sent the delicious fire rolling along his veins like one touch of Sidonie's small, firm hand.

When he had left Boston to make his fortune in cedar shingles, there had been the understanding between them that he was to remain a year and then return and marry Constance, and he was absolutely sure that she was the kind of girl to hold him to his promise.

Now he knew what love was. On Puget Sound the summer nights are long, purple twilights that soon after midnight silver into dawn. At one o'clock the birds utter their first drowsy notes, and dawn is felt, rather than seen, coming up the East. Night after night, as the summer went on, Gilder had sat with Sidonie in her tiny study till midnight. There was no society here; no one to suggest impropriety and steal the pure sweetness out of their intercourse.

Gilder had taught the girl much; but she had taught him more. He had drawn from her the

sublimity and the exaltation of love, life, and thought. He felt himself rising, a stronger and a better man, out of his old self. He had the sublime exultation of one who mounts into clearer and higher air; who climbs to great and lonely heights, and finds the world well lost for the passionate, still rapture of being alone with God and of seeing with new vision the beauty and the majesty of His smallest work.

And the girl who had led him up these heights — he loved her so he trembled when he went into her presence. He worshipped her. Often he could not lift his eyes for what was in them — what he dared not let her see. Often he could not speak — for what he dared not let her hear. He had not forgotten Constance.

The thought of her, and of his allegiance to her, tortured him. He could put it from him during business hours and cares, and during the sweet, delicious hours he spent with Sidonie; but when he was alone it became almost unendurable. Constance — after having known Sidonie! A pale, odorless lily — after having found a rare and fragrant orchid in the lonely place where God himself had set it! Who would go back and dwell with the many in the valley, after having dwelt alone with one other on the heights?

As Mrs. Sumas Brown spoke, Gilder passed

the door on his way to his shack. She saw him, and cast a shrewd, curious look at Sidonie. "Yuh needn't blush so."

The girl went on arranging the table.

"I say I w'u'dn't blush so! There's no call fer blushin' so ev'ry time yuh set eyes on him. Yuh'll have the whole camp a-noticin' it. Your face's like fire. It 'u'd be different 'f he'd spoke up. But he ain't yet. Has he?"

The girl was silent.

"I say, has he? Why don't yuh answer me? Aigh?"

"Oh, mother!" exclaimed the girl, in sheer bitterness of soul. "If you ever ask me that again I'll go away and never come back."

"Oh, yuh will, aigh?" Mrs. Brown had a frightened look; but she kept right on nagging. "That's a pretty way to talk to your mother. I'd like to know 'f I ain't a right to find out his intentions. I can't open my mouth but yuh go to flar'n' up like a sulphur match. He's so 'n love with yuh he can't keep his eyes off o' yuh, an' I don't see why he don't speak up. I don't go much on men that make love an' make love, an' never speak up. First thing yuh know he'll up an' leave an' go back East, an' the Goshen Browns'll go round a-tee-heein' b'cause yuh let him slip through your fingers —"

Sidonie's face turned white. She went sud-

denly out of the room. Her respect for her mother was beautiful, and her patience great; but this was unbearable.

After an early supper that evening Gilder went into the little study.

"The summer is going," he said, "and you have never taken me to the place where the orchids grow. Let us go to-night. The moon rises at nine."

She rose instantly. "It's just the night to go," she said, putting on her hat. "We will go down the skid-road. The men are still at work. They've been falling all day. If we hurry we may see the last tree come down."

They walked as rapidly as the greased skids would permit, and were soon down in the forest. Presently they heard shouting as if in warning. A voice yelled — "All right. Go it!" Then there was silence, broken only by an axe beating through the heart of a tree in regular, rhythmic strokes.

"We're just in time," cried Sidonie, joyfully, springing around a curve. A mighty fir was ready to fall. Already there was a toppling movement among its highest boughs. The men had all withdrawn from the place where it was expected to fall, save the one who was giving it its last blow. They were roughly clad men. Their flannel shirts were rolled back from their

brown, hairy breasts. Each stood with knotted hands on his hips, resting one knee, like a horse. They breathed grandly, with swelling throats and chests. They wore their rude clothing with strong, unconscious grace.

Every man took off his hat as Sidonie flashed into view, with a gleam of sudden pleasure in his eyes. Two or three beat down the tall brakes with their feet to make a place for her. She glided into it, smiling. Gilder stood close beside her. Then all eyes were turned upon the tree.

There was a last blow, a warning shout, and the chopper sprang backward. There was intense stillness as the slim top started downward; then a soft noise, like the far-off shivering of the sea as it comes up the tide-lands, swelling gradually louder and louder, as the tree cut its way swiftly through the air and the tops of other trees. At the last it was like the roar of surf on rocky cliffs. It reached the earth with a crash of thunder that went echoing away in long waves of sound through miles of forest, and laid its beautiful tip three hundred and fifty feet from the spot where it had stood for a thousand years, with the sap throbbing out of its severed veins.

Shouting and jesting, two or three men leaped upon the prostrate body, and soon the saws went

rasping through the bark, feeling their way roughly to the wood underneath.

"Let us go on," said Gilder. They turned into a narrow path or trail that led into the deeper forest. They were followed by the clear ring of an axe beating its way into another tree. But soon this sound and all others grew fainter, until they ceased altogether. The early sunset was upon them, and already the sweet coolness of evening had sprung up about them.

It was midnight. For three hours they had been lost in the forest, wandering aimlessly. Now they had paused in a dim glen into which the moonbeams struggled faintly. Their feet were in a carpet of soft velvet moss. They were surrounded by great trees, from whose branches long fragments of moss drooped. Here and there glimmered a dappled, ghostly alder.

"It is like the place," said the girl, with a troubled sigh; "but not it. We may as well rest a while. I am very tired."

Gilder trembled. "It is a beautiful place," he said, "but I think we ought to go on. Lean on me, and we will walk slowly."

"But what good will it do?" she said. She leaned on him like a child, and they walked a

little way. "We may only wander farther from home. It will be better to sit down and rest till daylight. I'm so tired."

"We ought to go on," said Gilder, uncertainly.

"You're afraid they will be uneasy about us," she said. "They will not. Mother never worries about me. Once I was lost all night and she didn't worry; so, of course, she will not when you're with me."

Gilder was silent. She felt his strong, deep breathing.

"Let us sit down," she insisted, gently. "The moss is soft, and I'm so tired."

He took off his coat and spread it on the moss. He sunk upon it and drew her down beside him, keeping her warm hands in his palms.

"You are cold," she said; "you are trembling."

"I am not cold," he answered her.

Then they were both silent. The night was very sweet. After a little she said, low —

"I am afraid. I've never been afraid before."

"Lean upon me," said Gilder. His voice shook with tenderness. "I will take care of you."

"I know," she whispered. She knelt up, leaning her soft shoulder upon his breast and turning her face from him. "How sweet it is!"

"Aye," said Gilder, "it is sweet."

He pushed her sleeve to her elbow and stroked her arm as a tender father might have done — protectingly.

"You are trembling," she repeated.

He had loved her passionately for three months, yet had scarcely touched her hand. It was small wonder, he thought, that he should tremble.

They sat then with the pulsing stillness of the forest upon them. Neither spoke. He pressed his hand, still with that caressing movement, upon her arm. His lips were sunken in silent, deep ecstasy in her fragrant hair.

Sometimes there arises a moment of great and exalted passion that changes a whole life.

Only the day before Gilder had decided finally that he must leave the girl he loved. A letter had come from Constance. He had laid it away unopened. When he answered it he would tell her he was coming home to marry her. But first he would have a few short hours of happiness — a few short hours with Sidonie. Only to be near her, to look at her, to feel her gown touch him as she passed — that was all he asked. He had foreseen nothing of this exquisite contact that was to send drops of delicious fire thrilling along his veins. She was a child, and he was her protector; she was an angel, and he

reverenced her — but she was a woman, too, and he loved her.

"Do you hear something — some soft sound?" she whispered, presently.

"I hear the fir-needles falling," he answered her.

She sighed and moved a little, but not farther away.

After a few moments she said — "Do you hear something like a step?"

"It is Pan passing," he said. "We shall hear his horn presently."

There was another sweet silence. Then she whispered — "Do you hear something breathing — or some one?"

"Only you," he said. His voice shook. He put his arm around her in a swift, uncontrollable rush of passionate tenderness. She sunk closer to him, innocently.

"You are still trembling," she said. "I know you are cold."

"No, I am not cold."

"Then why do you tremble? Are you afraid?"

"Yes, I am afraid."

"Of what?"

"Of love! Sidonie — "

She turned quickly upon his breast.

"I love you . . . I love you," he breathed. His lips were upon hers. "Sidonie — "

"I know." Her arms went in sweet abandon about his throat. Her words were like the notes of a love-bird when it is alone with its mate. "And I love you."

Oh, the deep silences of the midnight forest! In those deeps there are silences in sound. Everything speaks: the trees to the violet heaven that stoops to them, the grasses to the wind that lays its cool length upon them. In marsh places the tall green swords of the tules clash softly together. The broad palms of the vine-maple clasp and cling together; the velvet tops of the firs move rhythmically to and fro; the pines whisper. The murmuring of countless insects swells into one harmonious choir — but all so soft, so far away! It is all sound, and it is all silence. One hears the fall of the tiniest needle on the grass, the caressing pressure of one leaf upon another, the curve of each blade of grass — if one knows how to hear God's divinest music.

After a long time Gilder spoke. His tone was that of a man who stands, rapt and exalted, lifted out of himself, on some noble mountain height — the world, with its little fevers and passions, its petty hopes and ambitions, beneath his feet.

"Dearest," he said, "we are in Arcadie; but we must go out from it."

"We cannot," she answered; "it is ours forever."

"Dearest, dearest! You break my heart! How can I tell you now?"

"You may tell me anything — *now*."

He pressed her to him with passionate, despairing tenderness.

"Dearest" — his voice trembled — "I have tried to keep away from this hour; I knew it could not last."

"It will last," she said.

"Sidonie, Sidonie! I cannot marry you." The words struggled from him.

"I knew that," said the girl, simply. "I have felt it all the summer. But it does not matter. It cannot take this hour from us! It cannot take our love from us! What can we ask that would be greater than only to have loved each other? It is our hearts and our souls that love; the world cannot separate *them*. Wherever we go, this hour shall go with us. There is nothing we may not endure *now*."

He leaned his mouth down upon hers, and pressed it there, motionless, and prayed silently — with a choke in his throat that must have shaken the very angels.

So they sat until presently there came a white glimmer along the tops of the trees.

"It is the dawn," breathed the girl, stirring

happily, as a bird does in its nest. "Now I can find the way. I know where the East is."

There followed a wretched week for Gilder. He kept away from Sidonie. He watched her going quietly on with her work, pale but serene. There was an unfortunate girl with a young child in a shack near by. Her parents had cast her off, and no woman would go near her. No woman save the one Gilder loved! She went constantly, day and night, to care for her and the child. Meeting her sometimes on these errands of divine mercy, Gilder was struck by the new look of austerity on her face. At such times he could have fallen at her feet and kissed the hem of her gown. She reminded him so keenly of the woman she had most wished to be — the mother of Christ.

At last a night came when he nerved himself to write to Constance. It was a warm, purple autumn night. The sun had gone down in a crimson haze, the twilight had deepened to dusk. He sat on his door-step watching the light in Sidonie's window, over which the vines were still green.

Crickets chirped in the new growth of ferns that had sprung up since the late rain. A night-hawk sunk upon the air, uttering its mournful, musical note. It was Saturday night, and all the unmarried men had gone to What-

com to spear salmon; every one else had retired. Only that one little path of light glimmered across the darkness, leading, Gilder thought, to heaven — the heaven from which he was shut out forever!

He rose suddenly and went in, closing the door. His lamp was lighted. He flung himself into a chair and seized his pen. His lips were set together, hard.

Then his eyes fell upon Constance's letter that had lain, unopened, a week on his table. He opened it mechanically —

Ten minutes later he was groping like a blind man to Sidonie's door. Before he reached it she came out, on her way to the mother and child. As he met her he took her in his arms and drew her close — close.

"Let me go," she said, sweetly and gravely. "The child needs me."

"I need you, too," he whispered, in a shaken voice. "Let me go with you. I have the right. There is no reason now why I should not go with you to life's end."

He felt the quick, responsive pressure of her hands then.

"Is there not?" she said.

"Dearest, trust me. I do not choose to tell you what was between us. There is nothing now. Will you trust me without knowing more than that?"

She sunk upon his breast in her sweet, childish way.

"Why not?" she said. "It is so foolish to wish to know little things. That is for little natures. I wish to know only great things; and the greatest of all I already know — that we love each other."

Then fell upon them one of the silences that God loves — because there is nothing like them outside of heaven.

'MANDY'S ORGAN

'MANDY'S ORGAN

Mrs. Bentley lifted up her voice. "Pig-oo-ee! Pig-oo-ee! Where's that other pig gone to? If there's anything as aggravating as a pig, I'd like to know what it is! They don't even know enough to come an' git fed."

She poured a pailful of vegetable and fruit parings into a long trough and stood back, watching the animals with grim satisfaction.

"That's right. Fall all over yourselves to git into the troth! No wonder you're called pigs. Well, I guess there's a plenty swill for all o' you. I wonder why 'Mandy don't feed them chickens; it's high time they was fed. 'Mandy! Hoo-oo-hoo! You 'Mandy!"

"Yes, maw. What d' you want?"

A girl about seventeen years of age came out of the kitchen door, and stood looking at her mother. Her hands were on her comely hips. Mrs. Bentley was twenty steps away, and the pigs were making so much noise she had to raise her voice to a disagreeable, rasping tone.

"What do I want? Why, I want to know why you don't feed them chickens! That's what I want. Step around lively, now; an'

don't fergit it's Christmas eve, an' a lot of extry chores to be done. You ac' as if you didn't care whuther the minister had anything for dinner to-morrow, or not."

"I don't care." The girl spoke with sullen emphasis. She came into the lane after a few moments had passed, and stood near her mother. Her apron, gathered up in her left hand, was full of wheat; with her right, she began scattering it on the hard ground.

"Mebbe you think it's fun to have ministers an' their wives an' a lot of childern to cook an' work for on Christmas," she said; "but I don't. I wish Christmas 'u'd never come — for all the good it does us. Work an' slave for comp'ny to stuff theirselves! Maria Quackenbush's paw's got her a new org'n," she added, suddenly. A glow of eagerness came across her face, but faded almost instantly.

"Has he?" said Mrs. Bentley, stolidly, watching the chickens.

"It's got twenty-four stops, maw."

"What has?"

"Why, the org'n Maria's paw got her for Christmas."

The elder woman set her lips together with a kind of habitual grimness.

"I guess it won't give out no better music than one with twenty-two," she said.

"No," said 'Mandy, with a sigh of indifference. "Oh, maw!" she added, suddenly, with a very passion of longing in her tone. "Do you think paw'll ever git me one for Christmas?"

"Land sakes! One what?"

"Org'n."

"I do' know," said her mother. "Looks sort of like snow, don't it? Which of them pullets you going to kill for to-morrow?"

"I do' know. Any of 'em's fat enough."

A dull grayness lowered upon the farm. The wind whistled shrilly, as it came around the corner of the big barn; it caught some loose locks of the girl's hair, and carried them across her neck. A horse came running up from the lower pasture, and looked over the high bars, neighing and pawing impatiently. Far away, down near the river, sounded the kingle-kingle of a bell.

"There comes the cows," said Mrs. Bentley. She sighed unconsciously. It was a sigh of resignation, however; she had been a farmer's daughter before she became a farmer's wife. "There!" she exclaimed, triumphantly, as a cock crew. "Didn't I tell you it was going to storm? You can tell it by the mournful sound of that rooster's voice. Oh, say, 'Mandy! Dick Underwood got home last week from town

to spend Christmas an' New Year. I just heard it while you was out in the fruit-house."

"I heard it yesterday," said the girl. She did not stir or lift her eyes, but a faint color came into her face, and a pulse in her throat began to beat uncomfortably.

Her mother gave her a keen, searching look.

"I guess he'll most likely be going to Maria's to-morrow a-seeing her new org'n," she said, looking away.

"Yes, I guess," said the girl. After a little hesitation, she added — "Maria's maw got her an offul pretty new dress."

"She did!" said Mrs. Bentley. She had an interested look. "What's it like?"

"It's a sort of brown and gold stripe — camel's hair. It's offul pretty," she added, with a kind of bitter reluctance.

Mrs. Bentley was awed into silence for a moment in imagination of Miss Quackenbush's splendor; then she gave a little sniff of contempt.

"Well, I don't see where them Quackenbush's git so much money to spend on foolishness! They got just the same for their potatoes that we did — an' they didn't have any bigger crop, *I* know. An' they ain't sold their hawgs yet. It beats me to see where they git their finery at. Well, there's one thing mighty sure: they needn't a one of 'em think she's going to look

any better in all her new duds than you'll look in that peacock blue o' your 'n."

"Old as the hills," said the girl. Her lips quivered, and there was an undertone of tears in her voice. Her mother looked at her in mute sympathy.

"Maria Quackenbush ain't got no such figger 's your 'n," she said, presently, taking stock of the girl's good points. "Nor no such hair, an' she don't know how to do it up like you do, neither. I don't suppose he'll take a notion to her."

"Who will?" There was a conscious look on the girl's face.

"Why, Dick Underwood. She'd talk the legs off of an iron pot."

"Who's a-caring whether Dick Underwood takes a notion to her or not?" cried 'Mandy, with a great show of scorn to conceal her hurt. "He's welcome to, if he wants. Nobody'll hender him, I reckon. I know *I* won't."

After a moment she added with stifled bitterness — "She got her a pair of gloves to match."

"*She did!*" Mrs. Bentley's expression was almost fierce. "Just as if that pair o' gray ones she got her in the spring wasn't good enough! They must of been thinking that dressing her up 'u'd help her face an' figger out. Her face 'u'd stop an eight-day clock! An' her figger

ain't much better. *Lean!* Have you got them chickens fed?"

"Yes." 'Mandy shook the last grains of wheat from her apron. Her face was flushed, and tears were struggling to get into her eyes now.

As she turned toward the house there was a clatter of unevenly galloping horses on the hard ground. Up to the gate dashed Maria Quackenbush and Dick Underwood. They were laughing noisily, in high humor, and there was much color in their faces, testifying to reckless riding.

"Whoa!" cried Maria, with spirit. "Whoa, I tell you! Hello, 'Mandy! How-d'-you-do, Mis' Bentley? My! I must be a sight! Guess my hair's all down my back, ain't it? When you git this horse warmed up there's no making him go slow. It ain't every girl that could ride him —aigh, Mr. Underwood?"

She struck playfully at his horse with her whip, causing him to start violently.

"Won't you git off an' come in?" asked Mrs. Bentley, with cold and unmistakable disapproval. "How are you, Mr. Underwood? Gracious! How you have changed! 'Mandy!"

'Mandy came to the big gate, blushing and looking rather shy and awkward. The young man jumped off his horse, and shook hands with her through the gate.

"I've only changed in looks," he cried, looking at 'Mandy with shining eyes. "No, we can't come in to-night. We promised Mrs. Quackenbush we'd be back early to supper."

"We're a-going to have some music an' singing," said Maria, loftily. "I've got a new organ for Christmas, 'Mandy."

"Yes; I heard," said 'Mandy, faintly.

"Got twenty-four stops an' two knee-swells — a loud an' a soft. One stop's a trembly one, to imitate the human voice. It's got a high back, an' a lookin'-glass, an' places for lamps an' vases. Can't you come over to-night?"

"No, I guess not," said 'Mandy. The color had all gone out of her face.

"No," said Mrs. Bentley, with a hard look at Maria; "she'll have to do all the work to-night. I'm a-going to town."

"Why, maw!" exclaimed 'Mandy, in amazement. "Are you, honest? What for?"

"To get some things for to-morrow dinner. I'm all out."

There was a look of swift resolution, and more than a suggestion of stubbornness, on her face; and a cold glitter, as of steel, in her eyes — especially when she looked at Maria.

"I wish you could come," said that young lady, airily, to 'Mandy, flicking her horse's ears with her whip. "I've got lots to tell you" — simper-

ing — "an' just piles to show you. I've got a new dress that'll make your mouth water!"

"Hunh!" sniffed Mrs. Bentley, tossing her head, contemptuously.

"It's brown an' gold camel's-hair. Fine — *my!* There ain't anything like it around here, I can tell you. It cost a dollar an' a quarter a yard!"

"Has your paw sold his hawgs yet?" asked Mrs. Bentley, with sudden and startling significance. But evidently nothing could shake Miss Quackenbush's self-satisfaction to-day. She had her eyes on high stars.

"I don't know, I'm sure," she replied, returning Mrs. Bentley's intense gaze with placidity. "An' I've got a new pair o' gloves to match, 'Mandy; the very latest! Guess you better come, after all. Well, we'll have to be going, Mr. Underwood, or we'll be late." She gave him a boldly coquettish glance from under her long lashes — whereat poor 'Mandy grew paler and her mother's face assumed a fairly purplish tinge. "Good-by! Hope you'll have a good time to-morrow. *I* mean to."

"Good night," said the young man, with a lingering look through the gate at the sweet, pale face with its wide, hurt eyes. "I wish you a very happy Christmas."

"Good night," said 'Mandy, with a poor smile that was scarcely a smile at all.

"Now, you go right in the house, an' do up all the work, 'Mandy," said Mrs. Bentley, when they were gone. She took up a slop-pail and walked with quick, resolute strides. Each step seemed to say — "I've made up my mind! I've made up my mind!" "You tell Peter to hitch up Dock an' Charley to the spring-wag'n, while I'm getting my dress on. I guess they'll have to mend up that whupple-tree with a halter strap. Now, you hurry up, too, so 's I can git off before your father comes back — I don't want him to try to stop me, because the old Harry hisself couldn't stop me to-day! I won't be home till to-morrow morning. I'll put up at Mis' Huntley's. Hurry up!"

Too heavy with her own reflections to give more than a passing thought to her mother's sudden resolution, and eager to get her white face away from those search-light eyes, 'Mandy gladly obeyed.

Twenty minutes later Mrs. Bentley came from the house and crossed the lane to the barn. She was "dressed for town." She wore a black hat, with a tall wing standing up stiffly at the side, and a long plush cloak, worn shiny at the elbows.

"I'll show them Quackenbush's if they can walk over my girl," she was saying. Her lips were pressed together hard. There was an

ominous look in her eyes. "Their camel's-hair dresses an' their latest style gloves! No such goods around here, aigh?" — She was mimicking Maria's tone, unconsciously — "A dollar an' a quarter a yard, aigh? Well, I'll beat that all hollow, an' I won't go into nobody's debt to do it, neither. I'll show them Quackenbush's! 'Mandy's paw'll never git stirred up to the pitch o' gitting her an org'n; an' what's the sense of my a-keeping that hunderd dollars to bury myself with? Guess I'll git buried decent, somehow. If the Lord sees every swallow fall, I reckon I'm big enough for Him to see me." She laughed, not irreverently, but with reluctant humor. "An' them enticing Dick Underwood over there on the strength of a new org'n with twenty-four stops an' two knee-swells!" Her tone was bitter now, indeed. "*I'll* show 'em!" she concluded, fiercely.

She climbed into the wagon over the front wheel, and gathered up the reins with decision.

"Git up!" she said, in a mood not to be trifled with.

As she passed the kitchen, she looked in, but 'Mandy was not to be seen. The ominous look deepened on Mrs. Bentley's face. The wind whistled around a corner and brought with it the first flurry of snow. She lowered her head and faced it defiantly.

The velvet whiteness lay on the ground to a depth of six inches when Mrs. Bentley drove, with a flourish of triumph, into the barnyard on Christmas morning. 'Mandy ran out, bareheaded. She was still pale. Her eyes looked as if she had not slept.

"Oh, maw," she cried, "what you got there?"

"Stop a-hollering!" said her mother, sternly. "It's a new org'n for you. It's got twenty-eight stops — an' three knee-swells!"

"Oh, maw," said 'Mandy, completely overcome. Then she gasped out — "You're a-hollering yourself!"

"An' a bevel glass in the middle, an' a bevel panel on both sides; an' two big pedals an' two little ones; an' —"

"Oh, maw, what's the third knee-swell for?"

"I don't know what it's for, an' I don't care. It's there, an' I just want to see Maria Quackenbush when she gits her eyes on it. I guess I can holler if I want to. I've *showed* them Quackenbush's! I've got a dress for you that cost a dollar an' a *half* a yard — an' two pair o' gloves to match!"

"Oh, maw," quavered 'Mandy, "you're a-hollering awful!"

"An' Dick Underwood's coming to dinner,

an' to stay the evening, to see the new org'n an' things! An' he asked me if I thought you liked him the way he does you! So if I ain't showed them Quackenbush's, I'd like to know who has! *An' I guess I can holler if I want to!*"

THE LORD'S PRAYER DRINKIN' GLASS

THE LORD'S PRAYER DRINKIN' GLASS

"What you got there?" said Mrs. Ganong.

The hired girl went forward timidly. There was a look that was both appealing and proud on her face. She held something stiffly in her hand.

"It's a Lord's Prayer drinkin' glass," she said, piously.

"It's a — what?"

"A Lord's Prayer drinkin' glass."

"A — Lord's — Prayer — drinkin' glass!" Mrs. Ganong began fumbling around for her spectacles. "What on earth do you mean?"

"Why, it's got the Lord's Prayer all on it, ev'ry word. I just happened to see it down to 'Levy's Fair,' an' I got it to make you a present of."

"Oh, h'm, yes," said Mrs. Ganong, who never prayed. "Where's my specticles at? It's reel clever of you, Prudence, I'm sure."

"Here's your specs, Mis' Ganong. It pretty near covers the hull glass. There ain't a single word left out. Wait — just let me read it all over, to be sure."

The girl held the glass close to her near-sighted eyes, and read the prayer off slowly and impressively, holding out one hand, with the fingers spread stiffly apart, like a country preacher. When she came to the words "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them who trespass against us," she paused.

"They've put that in great big letters," she said. "I guess it's about the most important thing in the hull Bible."

"Hunh!" said Mrs. Ganong.

The girl read on. When she had solemnly said, "Forever and ever, amen," she laid the glass reverently in Mrs. Ganong's lap.

That lady lifted it gingerly and inspected it through her glasses.

"Hum — yes," she said at last, handing it back to the girl. "It's reel clever of you, Prudence, to make me a present of such a nice drinkin' glass. I'm just as thankful as can be, I'm sure. Hum — where did you say you got it at?"

"Down at 'Levy's Fair,' clear down on the viaduc'. The wind was blowin' like ev'rything; I could hardly keep my feet. As soon's I see it, I thought, 'Oh, I'll make Mis' Ganong a present of it.' I'd of got you two of 'em, but this was the only one left."

"One's a plenty, I'm sure," said Mrs. Ganong, with unnecessary haste. "It's offul clever of

you to give me one. You hadn't ought to of done it."

"I've been wantin' to give you somethin' nice for a long spell." There was a proud shine in the girl's eyes. "You've been so good to me. So as soon's I see this, I cried right out to myself, 'My! if I hunt the hull earth over, I never'd find a thing as handsome as that,' so I went right in, an' up an' got it."

She went out of the room with a quick, high step, and set the glass away carefully in the china-closet.

Mrs. Ganong's face was a study. She sat perfectly still, looking out the window. At last she said, "A — Lord's — Prayer — drinkin' glass! I'd as soon of had a bicycle with an alumni rim, or tire, whichever it is. I'd as soon think o' climbin' onto one o' them heathenish things as to drink out of a Lord's Prayer drinkin' glass." Her hard lips unclosed in a wide smile. "Well, it can set on the top shelf o' the chany-closet. I reckon I needn't to begrudge it house-room."

The room in which Mrs. Ganong sat was as plain as herself. Over in one corner a highly polished stove shone out of a vast curve of zinc. Yards of pipe climbed the wall, making two or three elegant curves before it disappeared in a little glistening circle of tin. The yellow majolica medallions on the stove sparkled like gold,

the nickel bars like silver. A large-flowered three-ply carpet covered the floor. Mrs. Ganong thought that the greens and the scarlets in this carpet were the most beautiful colors imaginable. They were certainly the most vivid.

An organ with yellowed keys stood up primly in another corner. In exactly the middle of its top arose a white wax cross, bristling stiffly with ivy-leaves, under an oval glass case. On the wall, encircled by a frame made of fir-cones, was a wreath woven out of locks of hair from all Mrs. Ganong's friends and relatives. The sun was sinking down slowly over Puget Sound, and its long level rays trembled across those miles of satin water, and touched one wavy lock of hair in the cone frame till it glowed like fire. Mrs. Ganong, glancing up, saw it, and her face grew stern. At that moment Prudence lifted up her sweet young voice in the kitchen in a gush of song:

> "Her voice is low and sweet,
> And she's all the world to me,
> And for bonny Annie Laurie
> I would lay me down and die."

Mrs. Ganong arose abruptly and closed the door. Her lips moved convulsively. She was an old woman, and years of silent endurance had hardened her to most things, but — her only

daughter's name had been Annie Laurie, and the lock of hair that the sun was now burnishing had been hers. *Had been!* She was still living; but there was no Annie Laurie now for Mrs. Ganong.

In a moment she was herself again. She had been taken by surprise, that was all. The hired girl, or, for that matter, fifty hired girls, might sing "Annie Laurie" now till doomsday, and Mrs. Ganong would make no sign. She resumed her seat by the window, grim and silent.

After a little she said, "Well, if here don't come father, lookin' as sour as swill. Mad because I wouldn't sign that deed, I guess. Now he'll go to sewin' on buttons an' darnin' socks for the next two or three days!" She laughed noiselessly. "Ev'ry time he gets mad at me about anything he hunts up all his old clo's an' goes to sewin' on buttons whether they need buttons or not, an' darnin' socks that ain't got any holes. I s'pose he thinks it'll harrow my feelin's up offul."

She looked up with exaggerated pleasantness when her husband entered. He returned the look with a glare.

"It's a nice sunset, father," she said, cheerfully.

Mr. Ganong slammed a chair down close to

the stove, and collapsed into it, with his back to his wife.

"Set over a little bit, can't you, father?" said Mrs. Ganong, with aggravating amiability. "You keep the fire all off me settin' that way."

He scraped his chair along the carpet about a foot.

"Do you think the wind's a-raisin', father?"

Mr. Ganong mumbled.

"What-a-say, father? You do mumble so! I can't hear you ha'f the time, you mumble so. What-a-say?"

"I say, dang the wind!"

"Oh!" said Mrs. Ganong, with a laugh. "That you, Prudence? You got supper all ready, have you? That's right — don't let the grass grow under your feet. Set the table now, spry."

When the table had been laid and the supper brought in, Mrs. Ganong took her place, facing her husband triumphantly.

"Just you see how that sunset draws itself out," she said.

With her eyes dwelling on the golds and purples marching majestically down the western sky, she lifted her glass and took a long draught of water. Then she lowered her eyes. She gave a start, and sat motionless, staring at the glass. It was the Lord's Prayer glass, and she

had drunk from it unconsciously. She cast an angry look at Prudence, but the affectionate shine in the girl's eyes disarmed her.

"You prayed without knowin' it, Mis' Ganong, didn't you?" she said, happily.

A grim smile moved Mrs. Ganong's lips. She had prayed! She! Then her face grew grave. How long had it been since she had prayed? Not since that awful night when she had prayed, on her knees by her bed, till dawn, and at the last had cried out wildly to God that if He did not answer her prayer and give her back her child she would never pray again. And He had not answered it. When, later, He would have answered it and given back her child, she had set her lips hard and said that it was too late. She would have no sin in her house. She had driven her child from her door, and she had gone God only knew where. Mrs. Ganong never asked; she thought she never cared. She made no moan, she uttered no complaint. She took up her burden and laid it upon her, and carried it. Her back did not break, nor did it bend; she faced life grimly and held herself upright, but sometimes the thought of hell itself seemed sweet compared to some other thoughts of hers. And there was now and then a wild night when she arose silently from her bed and went forth to walk in the storm, letting the winds lash her

and the rains drench her, suffering, suffering, and enduring in fierce silence, like a dumb brute; and if, like a hot lance of lightning, the thought blazed through her mind that perhaps somewhere her only child was facing that same storm, homeless and friendless, she only set her lips harder together and bore that, too.

She set the glass down silently. Her eyes still dwelt upon it. She could not escape from the words that stood out, large and clear, from the others, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them who trespass against us."

For a second time that day something came beating up into her thin old throat and choked her.

Usually Christmas brings a sweep of yellow sunlight and a gush of bird-song to Puget Sound. Plushy catkins silver the pussy-willows, and the wild currant pushes out timidly its beautiful corrugated leaves. Every flower-bed has its border of blooming violets and pansies, terraces are drifted with "summer snow," and roses and crimson hollyhocks are not infrequent holiday guests. Often, too, by this time the wild lupine has sprung six inches from the moist brown earth, and little merry companies of

"spring beauties" spread their gauzy lavender skirts and peep out at passers-by from sheltering banks, swaying in the winds like fairy ballet-dancers. The inland sea is a deep, rich violet, with silver, throbbing clouds of sea-birds drifting above it; and as for the lonely grandeur of the snow mountains that glimmer mistily, like pearls, upon the sky, the sunrises that beryl the East and the sunsets that roll great thistle-downs of color through the opal gate that lets the ocean in to Puget Sound — there is no pen and there is no brush that can give their noble majesty to the world. But no more exalted praise ever mounts to God than that which silently swells the heart and uplifts the soul when the dweller in this peerless land turns to his window at dawn as a nun might turn to her rosary. From this land one day a Solomon shall go forth, singing to the world, and his song shall be neither of creeds nor of hells, but of pure and simple faith, of high, spontaneous praise, a love-song to God.

But that winter — oh, but it was long and hard and bitter! There had never been one like it. The old settlers sat moodily beside the grocery stoves and stared out the windows with dazed eyes, reluctantly confessing by their very silence that there was no such winter in their memories. It was the only one of its kind.

The Lummi Indians had prophesied it all summer, pointing to the caterpillars that crawled in armies over the board sidewalks and the fences.

For weeks the North wind churned the sea, foaming and roaring, out to the ocean, and bore the snow in keen, level lines through the air or heaped it into great drifts around the trees and houses. And these houses! They had been built — even the most comfortable among them — for sunlight and soft winds. The snow found their weak places and seethed in, piling into tall cones upon velvet carpets and polished floors. The rich shivered in beautiful homes, and the poor suffered in wretched shacks — alas, the poor!

It was the morning before Christmas. Mrs. Leathers was seeding raisins in the dining-room, which was also the sitting-room, when she was surprised by a call from Mrs. Wilson.

"You must of blowed over," she said. "Set down. My, ain't it awful!"

"It is," said Mrs. Wilson. She unwound her gray shawl from her head and shoulders. She was breathing hard. "There never's been anything like it on Puget Sound. I was born here, so I'd ought to know. I'm all het up! I wish to mercy I hadn't got myself all het up so. It's hard a-walkin' agen the wind. I'd

ought to of knowed better. I'll begin to sneeze pretty soon, an' when I begin there's no lettin' up."

"Well, I'm reel glad you come, anyhow."

"I see Mr. Ganong 's I come by, a-settin' by the window, a-sewin' on buttons. I should smile if I couldn't keep Mr. Wilson's buttons sewed on."

"Well, so should I. I see Mr. Ganong a-darnin' socks one day 's I come by. Her with a hired girl, too, that she's had ever sence she was ten years old, an' lets take liberties. Why, she give her a Lord's Prayer drinkin' glass."

"I know it. An' she sets up there ev'ry day, like a fir-tree stump, an' drinks out of it for fear she'll hurt Prudence's feelin's. I should smile to see myself humor a hired girl that way."

"Well, so should I. I should smile more to think of anybody givin' Mis' Ganong a Lord's Prayer drinkin' glass. My, oh!"

Then Mrs. Leathers leaned forward in her chair, drawing her eyelids together. There was always a rich morsel of gossip coming when Mrs. Leathers did that. It reminded one of a serpent ready to strike.

"Then you ain't heard?" she said. "You'd of let it out before this if you had of."

"No." Mrs. Wilson spoke regretfully. "I

ain't. What is it? You look as if it was somethin' awful. Out with it. Do."

Mrs. Wilson sunk her voice to a hissing whisper.

"Mis' Ganong's daughter's come back."

"Oh, my land! *Annie Laurie?*"

"Yes, Annie Laurie. She's been back a month, an' not a soul's knowed it tell now. She's livin', or rather, dyin', in a shack down on the beach, an' there wa'n't a soul went a-near her tell yesterday. She ain't got a bite to eat in the shack, an' only a little drif'wood that she's crawled out an' gethered up of herself — an' her a-dyin' of consumption. The wind goes through the shack as if it was a barn with the door open, an' the snow blows in an' *freezes* within six foot of her bed."

"Oh, my mercy —"

"An' her mother sets up there in her fine house with a hired girl an' a red-hot stove, an' her husband a-sewin' on his own buttons hisself, an' her a-drinkin' out of a Lord's Prayer drinkin' glass!"

Mrs. Leathers got up and set the pan of raisins on the table. She was pale. Her knuckly fingers trembled as she unbuttoned her apron. She walked with great strides into her bedroom, returning in a moment with a brown shawl over her head.

"Oh, Mis' Leathers! Where are you a-goin'?"

"I'm a-goin' up to see Mis' Ganong. *I'll* Lord's Prayer her!"

"Oh, my land! Ain't you afraid? Be you goin' to tell her?"

"No, I ain't afraid. I should smile if I was afraid of her. I'm a-goin' to tell her. *I'll* Lord's Prayer her!"

Mrs. Ganong was sewing when Prudence ushered Mrs. Leathers in.

"Oh, good mornin', Mary," she said, cordially. They had been girls together. "I wonder you come up this offul weather. It's reel clever of you. Set right down. Why, how pale you be! Be you sick?"

"Jane Ellen" — Mrs. Leathers spoke with a kind of fierce courage — "Annie Laurie's come back."

The grayness of ashes flashed over Mrs. Ganong's face. Her lips made one tremulous movement, but uttered no sound.

"She's been here a month, through all this turrable storm, a-livin' like a beggar in a shack down on the beach. She's a-dyin' of consumption, an' she ain't any wood exceptin' what drif'wood she goes out an' gethers up of herself. There ain't a bite to eat in her shack."

She paused long enough to draw breath. Mrs. Ganong had sat down and resumed her sewing, taking each stitch with care.

"It looks as if it was goin' to keep on blizzardy over Christmas," she said, cheerfully; but there was an awful beating in her throat.

"Jane Ellen, the snow blows into that shack an' freezes within six foot of the girl's bed. An' you set up here by a red-hot stove an' have all you want to eat an' a girl to wait on you, an' rock yourself an' *sew!*"

"I see Judge Neely's fambly has all come home to spen' the holodays," said Mrs. Ganong, amiably. "Why don't you set down, Mary? It's mighty clever of you to come up this offul weather."

Mrs. Leathers looked at her long and hard. Then she drew the brown shawl over her head and turned to the door. "May the Lord A'mighty forgive you," she said, and went out, bending her tall frame to the storm.

Mr. Ganong did not come home to the midday meal, and Mrs. Ganong fasted. Usually she was able to keep up appearances, but to-day, notwithstanding Prudence's curious eyes and solicitous care, she could not eat a mouthful. "Oh, Mis' Ganong!" said Prudence, with a sound of tears in her voice. "Can't you even drink a little tea? Oh, you ain't a-goin' to be sick for Chris'mas, be you? You look offul gray. Why, just you think about that great big turkey an' oyster stuffin', an' mince an' punkin pie, an' the plum puddin', an' hard dip, an' whipped cream. I guess there's lots

o' poor people so hungry that just to *smell* o' our dinner 'u'd seem most like dinner to 'em. I hear there's a poor woman in a shack down on the beach —"

"That'll do, now!" cried out Mrs. Ganong, in a great voice. "I ain't sick. I ain't one o' the sick kind."

"Well, you look it," said Prudence, comfortingly.

Toward night the storm lashed itself into a frenzy. There was a continuous roar, like that of the ocean, in the forest. The sea came pounding and seething up the tide-lands; the surf flung itself, hissing, high upon the rock cliffs; the houses shook and trembled.

Mr. Ganong did not come home. Mrs. Ganong sat down alone to her supper.

"You take an' eat now," said Prudence. "I've made you some corn-fritters. I knew you could eat them if you could anything. An' I made a little turnover, too."

"You're offul good," said Mrs. Ganong; but the first mouthful choked her.

Prudence brought a glass of water. "I'd ought to of kep' this glass an' give it to you fer Christmas," she said, regretfully. She stood silently deliberating for a moment, then she said, timidly, "Mis' Ganong, once I was in a-seein' Mis' Simmons's girl, an' I heard Mis' Simmons a-laffin' in the

settin'-room because I'd give you this glass. 'The idee,' she says, 'of anybody a-givin' a prayer glass to *Mis' Ganong!* Her a-drinkin' out of a glass that's got on it, *Fergive us our trespasses as we fergive them who trespass against us!* Why, she *couldn't* fergive, if she prayed tell her tongue dropped out! It ain't *in her* to fergive. She's made out o' stone —'"

Mrs. Ganong got up suddenly. Her face was quivering; her bony old hands shook. "It ain't so," she said, and her voice shook, too. "I can fergive, an' I have fergive. But I've been too proud an' bitter to give in to 't; an' I never would of give in to 't if it hadn't been for you an' your drinkin' glass. Prudence, you're only my hired girl, an' most people 'u'd turn up their nose at the idee of learnin' from a hired girl; but you an' your drinkin' glass has done what nobody else could of done. I've give in! I'll show Mis' Simmons an' Mis' Leathers an' Mis' Ever'body else that when I do give in, I give in *all over.* You get me my cloak an' my hood. I'm a-goin' out."

"Oh, Mis' Ganong! In this storm?"

"In this storm. Step spry now!"

Prudence went into the bedroom, closing the door. Mrs. Ganong lifted her voice. "Prudence!"

The girl opened the door and looked in.

"Was you speakin'?"

"Yes, I was speakin'. Step spry."

When Mrs. Ganong was carefully bundled up, she said, "You take this key, an' open the little bedroom —"

"Oh, Mis' Ganong! The one you always keep locked?"

"Yes, the one I always keep locked. Red it all up. Build a good fire in it, an' warm the sheets; an' have some hot tea. Don't stand there a-starin'! Step spry."

With her clothing flapping fiercely around her, the sleet stinging her flesh, and the winds shrieking in the telephone wires high above her, Mrs. Ganong went down the hill that awful Christmas night to find her child. Her body was bent forward at a sharp angle to her waist; her lips were set together, and her gray head was bowed.

A faint light shone from the curtainless window of the shack. She opened the door and entered. "I won't give way! I won't give way — I won't!" she had been saying over and over. "Them women'll be there, an' they sha'n't crow over me an' say I give way!"

But her heart was knocking at her throat and her knees were trembling. Her eyes went searching till they met Annie Laurie's and then she no longer knew that there were others in the room. Somehow she got to the bed. Not a word was spoken, but passionate tears swept

like rain down that bitter old face as she drew the girl up close, close to her breast, and held her there.

But in a little while she laid the girl gently down, and sunk stiffly upon her knees by the bed, and lifted up her face to God. "Oh, Lord, Lord!" she uttered. "You know how long it's been since I durst to pray! But I durst now, O Lord; an' I ask You to fergive me as I fergive her! Oh, Lord, have mercy —"

The girl's thin arm went around her mother's neck; and heaven knows well that she did not mean to be bitter or reproachful or anything but tender and comforting, when she said — "Oh, mother, don't you worry. When *you* can forgive, I know God can."

EUPHEMY

"Ephrum."

Ephraim gave a start.

"How?"

"I don't see 's we can get along without takin' a boarder in."

"How?"

"I say I don't see 's we can get along without takin' a boarder in."

"Oh!"

Ephraim stooped over the wash-bench again.

"Ephrum," said his mother, sternly, from her great chair by the window, "don't choo slush the water around so. You always slush it around so. Euphemy takes an' mops up the floor after you ev'ry time you wash."

"Oh, I don't mind," said Euphemy, cheerfully. She was flying about the big kitchen lightly, setting the dinner on the table. "Your maw an' me's been talkin' it all over, Ephrum — about the boarder, I mean. Skillings's have took one in, an' Mis' Skillings was here this mornin'; she says it helps out like ev'rything."

"That so?" said Ephraim.

He ran his fingers through his moist hair and sat down at the table, pulling his chair up with a squeak. Euphemy wheeled his mother's chair to the table.

"I don't see 's we'd ever get that mortgage paid off at this rate, Ephrum. A boarder an' lodger 'u'd pay twenty dollars a month, an' it 'u'd be most all clear gain, we got so many eggs an' vegetables an' so much cream an' butter goin' to waste."

"Hunh!" said Ephraim.

Then Euphemy settled down to her dinner softly, like a bird to its nest. She began to talk of something else. She was a wise young woman and she knew how to manage her cousin Ephraim and bring him around to her way of thinking.

"Your elbow's better, ain't it, Aunt Charlotte? I see you can use it some."

Mrs. Worden's countenance fell.

"Oh, yes, it's better now," she said, in a mournful tone; "but no knowin' when it'll go to actin' up ag'in. Between it an' my knee! One of 'em has to start up ev'ry once in so often, or it wouldn't be them. Didn't you have time to clean your lamp-flues afore dinner, Euphemy?"

"Yes, I could of," said Euphemy with a guilty look, "but I went out to get the dandyline greens an' got to findin' four-leaf clovers. I

found seventeen. I could of, if it hadn't been for that."

"Well, if you had of, you'd of got through with your work that much sooner this afternoon. I never see."

"Who'd you take in?" asked Ephraim, suddenly. Euphemy looked puzzled.

"How, Ephrum?"

"I say, who'd you take in to board?"

"Oh!" The small dissembler deliberated a moment with drawn brows. Then her face cleared. "Why, how about that young lady that's teachin' in the red school-house? I did hear she wanted a boardin'-place like ev'rything. She pays twenty dollars, too."

"Her that come into church last Sunday with her hair frizzled all over her head, and them big red hollyhocks a-danglin' all around the brim o' her hat —"

"Poppies, Ephrum. Poppies is all the style now. Yes, that was her."

"Well, then, we don't want her." Ephraim glared at her. "She had got herself up like a actress or a circus rider. I wonder the trustees has her! I like a neat, modest, well-behaved woman around me."

Euphemy blushed faintly, accepting this as a compliment to herself. She and Ephraim were engaged. She had a slim, neat figure, but

her face was exceedingly plain, with the exception of her eyes, which were sweet and wistful. Her soft brown hair went away from her face in little prim, even waves that ended in a knot at the back of her head.

"Land of love!" said Mrs. Worden, in a muffled tone. "Somebody's a-knockin'. Who d' you s'pose it is at this time o' day? This table-cloth ain't overly clean, Euphemy, but you'll have to bring 'em right in, I guess. Button up your wris'band, Ephrum. I wish we had more of a dinner. If it's that Mis' Dean, she'll see everything that's on the table an' ev'rything that ought to be on an' ain't, all at one look. You go on, Euphemy."

Euphemy went at once. In the old gray frame of the door was a picture of loveliness with the pale green of the orchard for a background; a young woman, all fluffs and frizzles and red poppies and dimples. She came in smiling, her eyes on Ephraim, who colored to the roots of his hair.

"I heard you were thinking of taking a boarder," she said to his mother, but still keeping her eyes on him. "I do wish you'd take me. I won't be a bit of trouble — really and truly." She cast down her long lashes demurely.

Euphemy looked at Ephraim in a kind of terror, fully expecting that he would annihilate

this audacious young person with one of his awful glances, before which she herself invariably quailed.

To her amazement he said:

"Well, set right down an' have a bite o' dinner. We'll talk it over. Set a place, Euphemy."

Mrs. Worden blushed across her eyes.

"We ain't got much of a dinner to-day," she said, with a sickly smile. "It's jest a pick-up dinner — scriddlin's, I may say. We'd always give you a better 'n this if you boarded here. Euphemy 'u'd fairly hump herself to see that ev'rything was up to the top notch. Your name is Sadie Milne, ain't it? This is my son. He expects to be one o' the trustees next term," she added, with an air of pride. "His father was one afore him. Yes, we've been a-talkin' about takin' a boarder in, but I do' know" — she looked the young woman over furtively — "we ain't much on style here. We have good plain victuals, an' Euphemy's a good cook — season with butter an' thicken with cream! That's my receipt for a good cook — but we ain't much on style."

"I'm not, either," said the young woman, letting two dimples come out to enjoy the fib. "This dinner is good enough for me. My, what cream!" She gave Ephraim a glance. "I saw you at church Sunday," she said, bashfully. "You sat just behind me. I'd have known

you anywheres again. You were so — so different, you know, from all the other men."

A glow like the sunset spread over Ephraim's face. He swallowed some potato so suddenly that he almost choked. His mother took a mental inventory of his charms, with a dazed air. "How different?" she demanded, while Euphemy thrilled and quivered with pride at the other end of the table.

The teacher blushed and toyed nervously with a bit of bread, squeezing it into a small cube.

"Oh, I — don't know," she faltered. "He is so — so — *distinguished*-looking — and so — er — I thought he was a — state senator," she concluded, lamely, quite overcome with confusion, but finding strength to give Ephraim one brief and eloquent look.

There was a great silence. Euphemy could do nothing but look at him with all her love and pride in her tender eyes.

At last his mother said:

"Well — I'm — sure." Then there was another silence. "Well — I'm — sure. He could of been one if he'd wanted to, I guess." Her chest swelled out proudly. "His gran'father was one. It ain't too late. Well, Ephrum, what you got to say? Do you want to take a boarder in? I guess Miss Milne wants to know right off."

"I'd just as soon," mumbled Ephraim, with a shamefaced air.

"What-a-say, Ephrum? I didn't hear you. Why can't you speak up loud?"

Ephraim lifted up his voice.

"I say I'd just as soon."

"Well, then, that's settled," said the young woman, putting one arm akimbo and eating her rice pudding with dainty satisfaction. "I'll have my things sent over to-night, and I'll be here in time for supper."

Euphemy looked askance at the bended arm, then at Ephraim. An arm akimbo was dreadful surely, at any time, in her gentle judgment, but at the table — what would Ephraim do?

Ephraim did nothing.

When she was gone, he picked up his hat and said:

"She ain't as bad as I thought she was. She's just young an' childish-like, I guess. She's reel nice spoken."

"Ephrum," said his mother, "you're a fool, if ever there was one."

Just before supper that evening Euphemy, running out on the back porch for something, swiftly and lightly as she always went, came

upon Ephraim standing with his face close to a little wavy mirror that hung over the wash-bench. He was holding his head well back, with his throat swelled out grandly and the look of an eagle in his eyes.

"Why, Ephrum!" she said, stopping abruptly. "What are you a-doin'?"

His fine feathers fell as he faced her honest, astonished eyes. He colored clear around to the back of his neck.

"Oh, nothin'," he replied, with a sheepish air. "I — was just a wonderin' if I hadn't best shave."

"Shave!" she repeated innocently. "Why, what for? This ain't Saturday night, Ephrum."

"No, I know it ain't Saturday night, Euphemy, but I thought — mebbe —"

He hesitated.

"Mebbe what, Ephrum?" She was still regarding him with astonished eyes.

"Why, I didn't know but what — mebbe — I'd best shave twice a week. I didn't know —"

"Why, you never have, have you, Ephrum?"

"No, I never have," he replied, with a kind of fierce impatience. "I just thought mebbe I'd best, that's all."

Euphemy pondered silently for a little while.

"You wasn't thinkin' of goin' anywheres, was you, Ephrum?"

"No, I wasn't thinkin' of goin' anywheres, Euphemy," he responded, irascibly.

She sighed helplessly.

"Well, then, I don't see what on earth put shavin' into your head, Ephrum, on a Wednesday night. Of course you can shave, if you want to, but if your mother or me had of wanted you to shave on a Wednesday night, you couldn't of been *drug* to do it. So I can't see."

Evidently Ephraim saw, for he came to the supper table with a clean, blue upper lip. His hair was brushed carefully, and his wristbands were both buttoned.

Always on summer evenings Ephraim sat on the front steps smoking his pipe; and when Euphemy had washed the dishes, strained the milk, and assisted his almost helpless mother to bed, she usually had a few delicious moments to spare when she would go out and sit beside him, resting one tired arm upon his knee, and be very, very happy.

That night there were more dishes to wash than usual. It was late when she went out into the sweet, cool night, only to find the young schoolteacher stretched luxuriously in her hammock, which Ephraim had swung for her that evening between the wall and a porch pillar. She nestled among many cushions, with her pretty arms thrown above her head and one slim foot in a

scarlet slipper hanging over the edge of the hammock.

Euphemy stood motionless.

"W'y, Ephrum! You ain't a-smokin'!"

"No," said Ephraim.

"W'y, why ain't you?"

"Oh, because."

"Because what, Ephrum? What ailded you to-night?"

"Oh, nothin' ailded me, Euphemy. I didn't want to, that's all."

Oh, the problems that one day may bring forth!

Euphemy stood with her arms hanging stiffly at her sides. The very earth seemed to be slipping from under her. Ephraim with a blue upper lip in the middle of the week, and Ephraim on the front steps on a summer evening without a pipe in his mouth!

At last she said, with a sound of tears in her voice:

"Oh, Ephrum, you must of been feelin' sick. Be you a-goin' to have a fever again?"

"Oh, Lord — *no!*" said Ephraim. "I wish you wouldn't pester so! What makes you pester so, Euphemy?"

"Euphemy," called a stern voice from an open window above them, "you come up here, will you?"

She went wearily up to her aunt's room. That lady was sitting up in bed with a gray quilt around her. A candle spluttered on a little table at the head of the bed. Her eyes were large with curiosity.

"What was you an' Ephrum a-talkin' about down there so loud?"

"Why, he wasn't smokin', an' I thought he must of been feelin' sick."

"An' was he?"

"No. He flared all up because I asked him. I can't see what ailded him. It kind of scared me for fear there was somethin' the matter with him. He never shaved before on a Wednesday."

"I guess there ain't much the matter with him, Euphemy. I wouldn't go to gittin' scairt, if I was you. There ain't a man alive that's worth a girl like you gittin' scairt about. Mebbe," she added, cautiously, "the teacher don't like tobacco smoke."

"Oh, Ephrum 'u'd never of stopped for that, Aunt Charlotte. I didn't use to like it, either. Don't you remember when I first come here it use to make me awful sick, but he went right on smokin'."

"Yes, I remember." The old woman had a habit of laying the bony fingers of her right hand in the hollows between the knuckles of the left when she was vexed or perplexed. She

did this now, fitting them in carefully and then looking down at them without seeing them. Her hard old face softened to a pitying tenderness for the girl. "Euphemy," she said, "come here."

The girl obeyed with a look of gentle wonder. Her aunt stretched out her trembling hands and took hold of those slim young wrists.

"Euphemy," she said, "I love you better 'n I love Ephrum — better 'n I love anything on earth. I'm old an' palsied, an' a hard life's made me bitter an' sour, but you've done all the work an' waited on me faithful for six year. Ephrum talked big about givin' you a home when your paw died, but Lord A'mighty knows you've earned six homes since you've been here. You've done all the work, an' took keer o' the milk an' made the butter, an' you've worked out 'n the field a-droppin' potatoes an' doin' all kinds o' Tom, Dick, an' Harry work. To cap it all, I've been cross an' crabbed — but you've never give me a back-sass word. So I just thought I'd like to tell you I loved you an' to kiss you good night."

The girl toppled forward stiffly into that bristly embrace, touched but unresponsive through sheer surprise. Her aunt had never kissed her. When she had come, a pale, starved-hearted orphan, into her new home, her aunt, who happened to

be stirring corn-meal mush in a big kettle on the stove, turned her head and looked at her over her shoulder.

"That choo, Euphemy?" she said. She had never seen the child. "You look like your maw did. Well, take off your things an' lay 'em on the table. I can't leave this here mush right now — it's splutterin' so. Be you all tired out?"

"Oh, no," Euphemy had replied, with a faint smile and a chill like death in her heart.

Nor had Ephraim ever kissed her — not even when she had promised to marry him with a rush of happiness that had shaken her frail little body like a leaf. At first she was always thinking he would, and she used to loiter on the way home from church on dark Sunday evenings with her hand through his arm. But he walked on, holding himself stiff and erect, with his chin in the air, pulling her grimly along beside him, or, if she loitered too insistently, sticking his arm out at right angles as an intimation that she might let go and stay behind if she couldn't keep up with him. One dark night she made sure he was going to kiss her at last. They had reached the porch and she stood close beside him while he fumbled with the key in the lock, being unable to make it turn. Finally he stopped, and turning his face toward her, said in a low tone, "Euphemy!"

She thrilled and trembled.

"Yes, Ephrum," she whispered. She slipped her hand encouragingly on his arm and lifted her face a little nearer to his. "What is it, Ephrum?"

"What in the old Harry's the matter of this keyhole? Stand over, can't choo, an' give me more elbow room, or I'll never make this key turn to-night."

After that she had given up all hope of his kissing her, and had settled down uncomplainingly to wait on him and his mother. One by one her sweet, girlish dreams had deserted her. She told herself sternly that kisses were silly things; Ephraim was above them. It was quite enough joy for any girl to be loved by Ephraim, to be daily hemming cloths for Ephraim's table and sheets for Ephraim's bed. If, now and then, on one of those white, silent summer nights, when the whole world seems to be aching of love and ecstasy, there arose in her heart a wish — so strong that it was like a passionate cry — that Ephraim were not above kisses and tender ways, she sprang up in her white couch in terror and commenced telling off the rosary of his virtues.

So her aunt's kiss was the first she had known since her mother died.

"I'd go right to bed, if I was you, Euphemy,

an' git a good night's rest. You look all fagged out. You ain't a-goin' to work so hard for that hifalutin' thing with them red poppies all around the rim of her hat. You ought to of see her a-standin' in front of the glass a-primpin' up for supper! You'd laugh. I say you sha'n't work so for her, Euphemy — I don't care how many mortgages we got on our house. Now, you go to bed. I would if I was you."

When the girl had gone the old woman blew out the candle, snuffed it and lay down heavily, pulling the bed covers up to her chin. Then she spoke out, quite loudly and distinctly. "Ephrum's a fool," she said, "if ever there was one."

As the summer passed Euphemy's problems increased. Ephraim amazed her with his "infinite varieties."

"He does just the things you don't expect him to do," she thought one Sunday morning as he walked briskly away to church with the teacher's red poppies shining at his shoulder. "I ust to beseech an' beseech him to go to 'leven-o'clock service with me, an' he wouldn't budge an inch. This makes the fourth time he's went right hand a-runnin' — an' here now I've got so much more work I can't go along of 'em. It beats me."

She grew vaguely troubled. She did not suspect the truth, and her aunt was afraid to enlighten her. But she felt that something had

come between Ephraim and herself; nothing that could be put into words — but still, something. Ephraim shaving twice a week, brushing his hair carefully before each meal, and keeping his wristbands buttoned; Ephraim sitting on the front porch till midnight with no one but that shatter-brain teacher for company — poor Euphemy being kept so busy all day getting the mortgage off the house that night found her so tired that she was forced to go to bed with the birds; and Ephraim loitering — actually loitering! — on the way home from church — these were problems of such complexity that she was forced to give them up.

One evening Euphemy assisted her aunt to bed earlier than usual, bathing her poor shaking arms with liniment until she fell asleep under the gentle massage. She never went down-stairs now after getting her aunt to bed, but to-night something impelled her to go. She went down softly, not to awaken the invalid.

Just inside the door she paused — and in that moment all her problems were solved.

"Why, you're not really engaged to her, Ephraim," the teacher was saying. "Not to Euphemy!"

"Yes, I am," Ephraim answered, sullenly. "I'm engaged to her fast enough. I wish — "

"Oh, Ephraim!" There was a sob in the teacher's voice. She threw her head down upon her arms, which were resting upon the step above her; this brought her very close to Ephraim's knee. "Oh, Ephraim! You'd ought to have told me before!"

"W'y, why ought I?" said Ephraim, stupidly. The teacher's shoulders shook with sobs. She moved an inch closer to his knee. After a little Ephraim put out one big hand and pulled her sleeve clumsily. "Oh, say — why ought I to of told you before?"

She did not reply, but presently she slipped her hand, white and soft as deep-napped velvet, up to his wrist and began fumbling in a heart-broken way with his wristbands. Then she said jerkily, with a twitch of her shoulders after every word:

"I — hope — you'll — be happy — with her."

"W'y, you see — "

"She don't — think about anything, though," her voice was muffled in sobs, "excepting — things to — to — *eat*. She won't ever — see — that you look like — a s-senator! I know she don't think — as much — of you — as — "

"As what?" demanded Ephraim. He commenced to swell out and take on a pompous look.

"As — as some might," she concluded, lamely. She slid her curved hand along his wrist, and gave one little, childish, appealing sob.

At once Ephraim did what she had been trying to tempt him to do all summer. He took her cool, flower-like hand in his big hot one. Then he held it, stiffly and gingerly, as if he didn't know exactly what to do with it after he had got it.

Her soft fingers folded around his. She moved a little closer and laid her head against his knee.

"You'll never be — a — s-senator with her — for a wife," she sobbed. "You need somebody — to — to be *proud* — of you, and to — to — *love* you — "

Suddenly Ephraim cleared his throat. Then he spoke up quite loudly and distinctly:

"I wish I hadn't been in such an all-fired hurry about askin' her," he said. "I'd best of waited; an' I might just as well of, for all of anybody else a-wantin' her. The only thing is — "

All this time Euphemy had stood there with straining eyes and ears. It simply had not occurred to her that she was seeing and hearing what was not intended for her. It did not occur to her now, as she turned and went groping blindly up-stairs. Only — she had strength to bear no more. So she went.

She got into her room and turned the key in the lock; then she fell, face downward, upon her white, nun-like couch.

"Oh, dear God, dear God," she prayed, "be with me to-night. I'm in awful trouble, an' I can't pray what I want to pray, for the words all stop in my throat and choke me up. Just help me. I can't never bear it alone. I know how many people need You worse 'n I do — poor mothers with little dead babies, and children with dead mothers — but, oh, dear Lord, I'm in awful trouble, an' my dear mother is dead, too. I can't tell anybody but You. *Help me!*"

The next morning Ephraim was harnessing the horses out at the barn when he heard a soft sound behind him. He looked up with a start.

Euphemy stood there, white-faced, holding a thin gold ring toward him.

"Ephrum," she said, "I — I've made up my mind I don't want to get married. Here's your ring. Don't you think it's anything you've done, Ephrum. I don't want to get married — that's all. I won't never marry anybody else. Don't you ever think there's a man on earth I'd ruther

marry 'n you, for there ain't, Ephrum. I just don't want to marry anybody."

Ephraim moved his great feet heavily. His eyes fairly bulged.

"Euphemy — what-a-say?"

She said it all over patiently, but in little jerks. There was such an awful throbbing in her throat.

A queer mixture of resentment and relief showed in Ephraim's face. He reached out clumsily and took the ring.

"Well, of course," he said, stiffly, "you don't have to marry me if you don't want to. I guess there's just as good fish in the sea as ever 's been caught."

"I guess there is, Ephrum."

He took a long, angry look at her. A girl who did not want to marry him was a curiosity not to be met every day in the year. He had always had an idea that her eyes were gray; but he discovered now that they were a clear, beautiful brown. And — "The teacher's figger ain't to be compared to her 'n," was his swift, astonished reflection.

"What made you up an' change your mind so all of a sudden?" he demanded.

Her eyes fell.

"Oh, I do' know, Ephrum. Don't let's talk about it."

"Well, don't let's, then. I guess you'll be sorry for this, Euphemy."

"Mebbe I will, Ephrum."

Her lips trembled. She turned quickly and went toward the house. Ephraim stared after her, unwillingly taking stock of her good points.

"She's got a dimned good figger," he muttered, reluctantly. "I never see her look so dimned fine before. I wonder what's got into her, anyhow!"

As days passed Ephraim's resentment increased, and his relief diminished. He set to work in dogged stubbornness to discover Euphemy's reason for changing her mind. The desire to do so possessed him so strongly that he even neglected to announce his freedom to Miss Milne. There was a plenty of time, he reflected, seeing she was so in love with him. While he was engaged to Euphemy the teacher's languishing overtures had thrilled his pulses with a delicious fire, having the incomparable flavor of forbidden fruit. He had felt, with much bitterness, that in plighting his troth so hastily to Euphemy he had lost a priceless gem. But now that he might have the gem if he would, he began to detect hitherto unsuspected flaws

in it. Unconsciously, Euphemy had made *the grand coup* in the whist-like game of love. She had changed places with the teacher. She was now the forbidden fruit. If the teacher had been aware of this, she would have changed her tactics, for she understood that it is only when a man is not free to make love himself that he can be stirred by having it made to him. At all other times it is intolerable.

Certainly Ephraim did not realize this himself. He intended to marry the teacher; but of course there could be no hurry about mentioning it when she was so obviously "agreeable."

He studied Euphemy with sullen patience. He had always looked upon her as a little plain, domestic thing, who would make an obedient, uncomplaining wife; one who would cheerfully perform the work of a "help" and a hired man, 'tend the "derry," wait upon his mother, give him a peach cobbler with whipped cream for supper every night, and still have time to raise a nice family of boys — girls were useless things.

Now, through much and close observation, he found the truth borne in upon him that her eyes were deep and wistful; that her mouth was sweet, and her "figger" round and full of tempting curves that were accented by the simple gowns she wore. And, then, her cooking!

One night at supper, between great mouth-

fuls of his favorite dessert, he said suddenly to the teacher, "Say, can you make a peach cobbler?"

She gave him a tender, reproachful glance. "A peach cobbler! Can I make the *moon?*"

"Well, you might learn," he said, stiffly. "Euphemy 'u'd learn you in no time."

"Euphemy's got enough to do without learnin' people to cook that's old enough to know how if they'd a-wanted," spoke up his mother, glaring at him. "Euphemy's learned to cook an' slave to git mortgages off o' farms, instid o' foolin' her time a-sewin' ruffles an' ends o' ribbon all over her!"

The teacher burst into a merry laugh. "Oh, now, Mis' Worden, I'm afraid you don't like my ruffles."

"I can't say I do, ma'am. I don't like the red poppies a-danglin' around your hat, neither. They're too actressy fer me."

Euphemy jumped up.

"Have some more cobbler, Aunt Charlotte," she said, hurriedly. "Oh, now, do."

One pleasant Sunday, coming home from church with the teacher, Ephraim came to a sudden standstill at the parlor door. On the vivid red plush sofa sat Euphemy with a rosy face; and close, very close, to her in a straight, high-backed chair, sat Judge Nelson, whose wife

had been such a famous cook and housekeeper, and who had been dead only a year. He owned the largest farm and had the finest house in the county. He sat with his long black coat-tails hanging straight down on both sides of his chair and the tips of all his fingers set stiffly together in a conical shape above his knees.

Euphemy got up quickly and edged towards the door.

"Oh, you back, Ephrum? Judge Nelson's come to spen' the day. You entertain him while I get dinner, will you?"

Ephraim grunted. The Judge looked after her with a beautiful beam in his eye.

"An' after dinner, Miss Euphemy," he said blandly, lifting his voice, "we'll take a little buggy-ride, if you're agreeable. You've never see my house, have you? I want that you should see it. Well, Ephraim?"

"How are you?" said Ephraim, sullenly.

"Been to meetin'?"

"Oouh-hoouh."

"Took the teacher, aigh?"

"Oouh-hoouh."

"Say, Ephraim" — the Judge leaned forward confidentially — "I used to think you an' Euphemy had settled things; my wife always thought so, an' all the young fellows around here thought so. That's the reason they didn't

offer to beau her any; but since you've been a-beauin' the teacher they're all of 'em wild to get Euphemy. She could have her pick any minute." Then he colored up. "I don't mean to let 'em, though; there ain't a girl in the whole county got a figure like hers. There ain't a one so qualified to be a judge's wife."

After dinner the Judge lifted Euphemy carefully into his buggy and drove away. He had a fine buggy and a handsome team.

Ephraim's breast swelled with rage.

"Hoouh!" he hissed out. "Dimned old galoot! Guess she won't have *him* if she wouldn't have *me!*" But his heart quailed. "Best house an' farm in the county," he muttered, bitterly. "An' horses an' cows! An' he a judge. I reckon if she's good enough for a judge she'd of been good enough for a senator. I'd like to know what ailded her when she changed her mind."

He heard a springing step and a flutter of flounces on the stairs. He gave a start and made for the barn.

"Ephraim," called the teacher, tenderly, but he walked right on as if he had not heard.

There followed a wretched month for poor Ephraim. The old meek Euphemy, unnoticed and unfeted, ready to run like a dog at his bidding, was no more; in her place had arisen a

sweet, blushing girl, with a judge at her feet and a countyful of admirers coming to take her buggy-riding or to apple-bees. Ephraim looked on in grim silence. Wasted were the red poppies and the languishing glances.

"Euphemy's the belle o' the county," announced his mother, with a triumphant crow deep in her throat. "I never see a girl come out so an' git so pretty. She never had anything made of her before 's the reason. The Judge is just a-dyin' t' git her — goes a-moonin' around like a sick ca'f. They're all a-runnin' after her, but he's ahead. He keeps a-hintin' offul strong about travellin' through Europe. Land knows he's rich enough. Euphemy always was wild to travel. The Judge — "

"Dimn the Judge!" hissed out Ephraim. He jammed a chair against the wall and flung himself out of the kitchen.

All this time the teacher, somewhat dismayed, was playing her cards cautiously; and poor Euphemy was successfully concealing an aching heart. Mrs. Worden looked on with the fingers of her right hand laid between the knuckles of her left, and a grim smile weighing down her mouth.

At last a soft moonlit night came. Euphemy went buggy-riding with the Judge. They did not return till eleven o'clock. They lingered at

the gate a little while, then the Judge drove away. Euphemy came slowly up the path alone. Ephraim was sitting on the front steps.

"Euphemy!"

"How, Ephrum?"

"Are you a-goin' to marry that galoot?"

"If you mean the Judge," said Euphemy, with dignity, "I don't know. He's asked an' asked, an' I have to make up my mind to-morrow night. It's awful hard. I — don't — love him just as I'd ought; but he'd be good to me, an' — an' — after you get married I won't have anywheres to go to. He'll let me take your mother an' wait on her 's long as she lives. He's offul good."

"He's an angel, ain't he?" snarled Ephraim. "Now, let me tell *you* that I've been asked an' asked, too, an' I've got to make up my mind. An' what I do depends on what you do."

"Ephrum!" cried Euphemy, with a burst of passionate reproach. "What do you want to talk that way for? Oh, Ephrum, I heard ev'ry word you said to the teacher out here that night — when you wished you hadn't been in such a hurry about askin' me!"

"You — did? Euphemy!"

"Yes, I did. I didn't mean to, but I couldn't help it."

There was a long silence. Then Ephraim said suddenly:

"Euphemy, was that what ailded you?"

"Yes, it was, Ephrum."

"Hoouh!" He pondered a time silently. "Euphemy, I was an all-fired fool. I'm beginnin' to see through her now. I don't wonder you flared up an' wouldn't marry me. I've been tryin' to make out what ailded you. That's it, aigh? Well, now, Euphemy, I wouldn't marry her if she was the only woman on earth. I ain't got a fine farm an' house, or a horse an' buggy, an' I can't take you around a-travellin', but I'd rather marry you 'n any girl alive."

"Ephrum!" Her voice trembled. "Don't you say that unless you're sure."

"Well, I'm sure."

"Don't you say that if you think you'd ever change your mind ag'in. It 'u'd — it 'u'd — kill me."

"I never will. I've found her out now. If you say so, we'll git married reel soon."

Euphemy trembled closer to him. Sudden joy gave her courage.

"Ephrum," she faltered, "couldn't you — couldn't you — kiss me?"

Ephraim gave a start.

"What-a-say, Euphemy?"

"I say — couldn't you — kiss me?"

"W'y, yes," said Ephraim, in the tone he would have used if she had asked him to light

a candle. He hesitated, then stooped and gave her a brief, stubby kiss.

"It's a-gittin' latish," he said. "Let's go in."

He arose and entered the house, Euphemy meekly following him. His chest swelled out superbly as he went up the stairs.

"Hoouh!" he thought. "I should smile if I couldn't cut that galoot out!"

At the head of the stairs he paused.

"Euphemy!"

"How, Ephrum?" She slipped to his side like a bird in the darkness. Was he going to kiss her of his own desire? "What-a-say, Ephrum?"

"W'y, I wish you'd have some saleratus biscuits fer breakfast. You ain't had any fer a coon's age."

THE PITY OF IT

"Minervy! Minervy! Yuh got them ca'ves up?"

"No'm; not yet."

"Well, clear out. High time. It's time fer your paw to be back from town. I'd be ashamed to go a-puttin' things off so, an' a-curlin' my hair to a crisp with a red-hot iron! Primp! My-*O!* What's the use in primpin' so? If Doug Hodges comes home with your paw to spend Christmas, he'll be apt to find out your hair don't curl of itself. Mercy, child! Yuh didn't git a good curl on that one at the back o' your neck. Yuh might as well do't right while you're a-doin' it. I'd laff if I couldn't curl my hair evener 'n that, an' expectin' a beau to come an' spend Christmas! Take an' give me them tongs."

Minerva handed her mother the curling-iron with a sigh of mingled relief and exhaustion. She was a slim, sallow-complexioned girl, with large, irregular features. She had a weak little stoop which made her shoulder-blades stand out sharply. Her eyes, alone, were beautiful. They

were large and brown, with golden glints in their velvet depths. They were wholly out of harmony with her sickly face and poor figure.

Her mother gave her head a sharp push and it dropped forward in limp obedience on her long neck.

"There!" said her mother, in the vigorous tone with which she would have said "so!" to a cow. "Bend the back of your neck out so 's I can git the tongs around this lock."

The girl stretched her neck further in a futile attempt to perform this impossible feat.

"Oh, my, there! Don't stick your neck out that way or your head'll roll off in the cellar," exclaimed her mother, with a sigh of impatience. "Yuh never can do things like other girls. There's Lily Belle McNamara now — why can't yuh pattern after her a little? Her hair's always curled jest as pretty at the back o' her head 's on the forehead. She don't stick out her shoulder-blades the way you do yours, neither. It makes a body feel offul to see yuh stooped over so! Lily Belle McNamara holds herself up like an arrer; everybody looks when she goes up the aisle at meetin'. She always looks jest as neat as a new tin pan, too. I see her once jest after she'd wed out a big redish-bed, an' my-*O!* She didn't have a speck o' dirt on her. Look-ee! there goes the minister,

all primped up in his best, with his chin clean shaved! I bet he's a-goin' down to see the Widow Peters. I bet."

Mrs. Bunt gave the iron a jerk, releasing a small, bobby curl on the back of Minerva's bended neck. Two strides took her to the window. She pulled the green shade cautiously aside and peered out. Her skin wrinkled up around her narrowed eyes.

"Yes, sir-ee!" she announced, triumphantly, a moment later. "If he ain't, yuh may shoot me! Turned right down the Northwest Diagonal, as bold as brass, without so much as lookin' around to see 'f anybody see him. He must be pushed. His wife ain't dead a year — an' him with his chin shaved up that way! I bet the mournin' band's off o' his hat a'ready. I reckon that's where he's a-goin' to dinner to-morrow. I ast him here, an' he said he had an invite ahead o' me. She must of ast him the minute he got back from his wife's fun'ral! I see her 'n the Rialty in Seattle, the other day, a-buyin' a lavender dress!"

"I'd like to have a lavender dress," spoke up Minerva, suddenly, with a little quaver.

"A — lavender — dress! For pity's sake! What do yuh want of a lavender dress, complected like you?"

"I don't see why not."

"You don't see why not, aigh? W'y, you'd look like sole-leather."

There was a silence. Another little bobby curl nestled beside the first on Minerva's neck. Presently she said, and there was a break in her thin voice — "What do yuh think I'd look best in, then, ma?"

"W'y, I do' know." She reflected with thoughtful eyes. "Let's see." She burst out laughing suddenly in comfortable mirth. "If yuh want fax, Minervy, I do' know 's there's any best to yuh. The Lord didn't do overly much fer yuh in the way o' looks. Lily Belle McNa —"

"I guess, if you've done curlin' up my hair, ma, I'll take an' get the ca'ves up," said Minerva. There was a hurt look on her face.

"All right. It's high time. Wastin' your time so, a-curlin' your hair! Lily Belle —"

Minerva slipped out of the room and closed the door. She coughed as she went.

The Bunt ranch was on one of the large islands of Puget Sound. The boats came up through a long blue arm that almost divided the island. It was a beautiful thing to see — their coming in; the white line of smoke winding around the firred crests of the smaller islands, and later the glistening curves of the boats themselves, as they came throbbing up the narrow water ave-

nue, floored with blue and ceiled with blue and walled with sombre green. Here and there rich fruit and vegetable farms sloped down to the water from their dark forest background. They were green with clover and fall-sown wheat, although it was the day before Christmas.

Minerva threw a shawl over her head to protect her new curls from the ravages of the salt wind, and ran down the narrow path to the pasture. There had been no heavy frosts yet, and the young brakes were bravely putting up their curved heads, pushing the moist earth into little cones around them.

The willows were hanging out their silver tassels; the wild eglantine was in leaf. In damp places the skunk-cabbage had spread anew its broad leaves, from whose velvet depths would, later on, reach beautiful golden hands bearing pale, early torches in their hollowed palms.

It was sunset. The sky burned yellow as brass. Light, saffron-hued clouds went marching down the West. The sea swelled up in strong, even waves. The tall dark firs bowed and lifted in the wind. All nature throbbed with a fierce, rhythmic movement.

Minerva stooped by a sheltered bank, and plucked a handful of "star" flowers. "Poor, little pale things," she said. "They've come

too early; the frost or the cold rain'll kill 'em, sure."

She pinned them on her flat breast, and went on. She let down the bars, and the calves came leaping through from the pasture. She stood for a few moments looking down the blue arm with a soft light in her eyes. Then a faint trail of smoke drifted slowly into view. She started from her leaning posture, and a rich glow burned over her face.

She put up the bars with trembling hands and hastened home.

It was a full hour before the boat glided into the Bunt pier, which had been most fearfully and wonderfully fashioned out of "shakes."

Minerva was assisting in the preparation of supper.

"Has he come with your pa?" asked her mother, entering the kitchen; for those two there was only one "he" on earth.

"I do' know," said Minerva, fumbling about aimlessly. "I ain't looked."

"Yuh ain't looked, aigh? It's a pity yuh ain't looked! Why, what ails yuh? Yuh go around as if yuh was a-steppin' on eggs. What makes yuh ac' the dunce so? It ain't the first time he's come, by a jugful. Goosehead!"

"D' yuh want this here apple-butter for supper, ma?"

"Yes, I want that there apple-butter for supper — if he's come. Why don't choo look out an' see if he's come?"

"I can't," said poor Minerva, faintly. "I'm so afraid he ain't come. You look, ma."

"If he ain't come," said Mrs. Bunt, derisively, setting herself broadly before the window, "I reckon yuh'll have the creepin' paralysis come on an' stay on till he does come. Well, he's come. He's all fixed up. He's finer lookin' 'n ever. There ain't a young man on the Sound got a better pair o' legs 'n his'n," she added, with pride. "It's a wonder Lily Belle McNamara ain't set her cap at him, seein's he's been teachin' school so clost to her pa's. Not that it 'u'd do her any good. He never'd dare throw off on yuh, after his mother an' me fixed it all up of ourselves."

"Well, I'd dare — if he wanted Lily Belle McNamara, or Lily Belle Anything else," said Minerva, with a quick, unexpected flash in her eyes.

"Yuh needn't to explode so. They're right here 't the house. All is," she added, with a stern look as she went to the door, "I sh'u'd jest like to see him try to throw off on yuh. I'd show him pretty quick that he c'u'dn't come it." She opened the door. "Land o' Love an' Goshen! Yuh come, did yuh? It's a cure for

sore eyes to see yuh, Doug Hodges. Come right in. Never mind your feet. Whose trunk was that come in on the boat with yuh?"

"How?"

"I say, whose trunk was that come in on the boat with yuh? Yuh gone deef?"

"Trunk? I do' know."

"Well, come in. Here's Minervy a-waitin' to see yuh."

Minerva came forward, scarlet-faced, and shook hands limply. Her hand was like a bird's claw.

The young man's face reflected the scarlet of hers.

"Well, Minervy," he said, "you gettin' supper?"

"Yes, sir," said Minerva, with quivering politeness.

He sat down and slid his chair to the window with a squeak. "It's a-goin' to be a nice Christmas."

"It is so."

"It's lots warmer 'n usual."

"Yes, it is so."

There was a beautiful happiness now on Minerva's face, which had been so pale and anxious about the time the boat landed, but it was a happiness that had something pathetic in it.

The young man did not seem to be overburdened with joy. He looked embarrassed and ill at ease. His weak blue eyes shifted away from Mrs. Bunt's steady, asking look.

Finally she said, dryly, as she took a sip of the boiling gravy to test its seasoning — "What's the matter of yuh, Doug?"

He gave a jump.

"Matter? Nothin'. Why?"

"Yuh look so. B'en teachin' school over close to McNamara's, ain't choo?"

"Yes'm." The red came back to his face.

"Hunh!"

There was a silence. Minerva was stepping around spryly. Now and then she looked at him with shining eyes. The little curls were bobbing coquettishly on the back of her neck and on her brow. The remainder of her hair was twisted into a tight wisp. She wore a dull green, badly fitting dress, with funny bows of ribbon sewed over it. Once the young man gave her a long searching look; then, without the slightest change of countenance, he turned his eyes toward the boat just drawing away from the pier.

Mrs. Bunt poured the gravy into a bowl, scraping the pan dexterously with a tin spoon.

"Yuh know Lily Belle?"

The young fellow cleared his throat.

"Ye-es'm."

"Supper's all ready. Set up. Pa! Oh, pa! Why don't choo come to supper? I don't see where that trunk's a-goin' to. Minervy, is it still a-settin' down there on the worf?"

Minerva craned her long neck.

"Yes'm."

Mrs. Bunt sighed helplessly. "It beats me. Well, set up before everything gets cold. Oh, my land! I bet it's the Widow Peters's noo outfit! It just struck me all of a sudden."

"I hear yesterday that her 'n the minister was a-goin' to get married," said Mr. Bunt.

"I bet."

After supper Mr. Bunt went out to the barn to "fodder" the cattle. The guest arose to accompany him, but Mrs. Bunt pointed with a large, crooked finger to the sitting-room. "You go in an' set down. I'll come in an' talk to yuh while Minervy reds up the dishes."

He went in with an unwilling air and sat down by the big fireplace. Mrs. Bunt closed the door and pulled her chair up close to him.

There was a clatter of dishes. Minerva lifted up her weak, cracked voice, and commenced to sing:

"Last night there were four Marys,
To-night there'll be but three;
There was Mary Seaton and Mary Beaton,
And Mary Carmichael and me!"

"I wish she w'u'dn't sing that mournful thing so," said her mother. "It makes somethin' come up in my win'pipe. She seems to lean to mournful songs — graveyardy, I call 'em. She's turrable happy because yuh come to stay Christmas, Doug."

He stirred uneasily. "That so?"

"Yes, it's so. You're the only thing she's ever had to be happy over. B'en stuck here on this island ever sence she was knee-high to a grasshopper. If anything happened to yuh, I guess it 'u'd kill her — there ain't much to her, with that cough o' her 'n. How old be yuh now?"

"Twenty-five."

"Hunh! Most time yuh was a-settlin' down, ain't it?"

Young Hodges swallowed before he spoke. He was very pale. He took up the poker and commenced stirring the red coals.

"I expect so."

"Yuh've been engaged to Minervy now close onto four year."

There was no reply.

"Ain't yuh?"

"Yes'm."

"Well, why don't yuh settle down?"

Perspiration began to bead upon his brow. He realized that the awful ordeal, the mere anticipation of which has given sleepless nights

to more than one young man, was upon him. He was being asked his "intentions."

"I do' know," he said, helplessly. "I do' know just why I don't, Mis' Bunt."

"Well, yuh'd best think about it. Why don't yuh live on your ranch instid o' gaddin' to the other side o' the island to teach school? Yuh'd make more."

"Maybe I would."

"May bees don't fly in December. How's Lily Belle McNamara?"

"She's well."

He punched the fire till the sparks sputtered up the chimney in a scarlet cloud.

"Hunh!"

"She — she — she's comin' over here to-morrow."

"Over where?"

"Over here."

"Here? *Here?* To our house?"

"Ye-es'm."

"What's she comin' here for?"

"To spend Christmas, I s'pose."

"People don't go to places to spend Christmas without an invite." There was an awful sternness in Mrs. Bunt's voice.

"Well, I — I give her an invite."

"Yuh did? Yuh ast her to come here to spend Christmas? What made yuh?"

"I thought maybe you'd like to have her."

"Yuh thought maybe I'd like to have her, hunh?" Mrs. Bunt's tone was withering. "Well, when I want anybody I've got enough gum'tion to ask 'em of myself. I ain't anybody's skim-milk — an' my girl ain't, neither."

The door was opened hesitatingly and Minerva entered.

"I guess I'm all through, ma."

"Well." Mrs. Bunt got up slowly. "Go back an' put a stick o' wood in the stove."

As the door closed she fronted the miserable-faced young man again.

"Seein's yuh can't screw up courage to set the day, Doug," she said, with cheerful affability, "I'll help yuh out. We'll call it the first day o' May; an' if yuh don't walk up to the church with Minervy on that day, I'll take that big ranch o' your 'n for breach o' promise."

Minerva came in again, and Mrs. Bunt retired with a parting injunction: "Don't set up later 'n twelve, yuh gooseheads, you!"

Miss Lily Belle McNamara arrived on the noon boat. Young Hodges went down to meet her. Minerva and her mother stood at the window watching them climb the hill.

"She's got a noo hat," announced Mrs. Bunt, grimly.

"It's offul pretty; got purple grapes on 't. They're the latest style. She must of got it in Seattle."

"Well, I wish yuh held your head up the way she does!" The glow went out of Minerva's face. "She's got on a noo dress, too. I'll be switched if it ain't got velvet panels up the sides! There — lookee! What a straight up-an'-down back she's got — no wonder she looks stylish." She turned and gave a dissatisfied look at Minerva's shoulders. "Why can't choo hold yourself up? Stand an' stoop! She wears her dresses mighty short."

"She's got pretty ankles," said poor Minerva, with a sigh that had no malice.

There was sufficient woman in her to envy the ankles far more than the straight up-and-down back.

She went to the door slowly.

"That choo, Lily Belle?" she said, with a struggle to be cordial. "I'm reel glad yuh come. Why, Doug, you're offul red in the face — I never see you so red before."

"It's hot work climbin' the hill," said her mother, dryly.

"It is so," said Lily Belle, gayly. "I'm ready to drop — so I guess I will." She sunk, laugh-

ing, upon a chair. "My, I forgot to say 'Merry Christmas!'"

She sat in a beautiful glow of health and happiness, and Doug Hodges stood looking down upon her, gloating over her beauty.

As he so stood, Minerva's eyes went to his face and dwelt there at first with gentlest love, only; but later with something else that sent the blood away from her plain face.

"Well, don't set in the kitching," said Mrs. Bunt. "There's a fire 'n the settin'-room. Step right in."

Lily Belle cast a glance at Minerva's old low-backed organ as she passed. "Oh, Minervy, can you play the 'Prize Banner Quickstep?'"

"No, I wish I c'u'd."

"Well, I can — I've just learned it."

"Minervy can play 'Angel Voices in the Night,'" announced Mrs. Bunt, proud as a peacock. "It's lots harder 'n 'the Prize Banner.' It's full of little grace notes. Yuh can't play *it*, can you?"

"Oh, yes," said Lily Belle, pleasantly; "I could play it three year ago."

She sat down at the organ and commenced playing something light and merry. She played with spirit and grace, making the old instrument turn out jigs and hornpipes far beneath its dignity. Doug Hodges stood with his arms folded,

observing her intently. Minerva stood with her back to the window; her eyes never moved from his face. She was very pale. She breathed slowly and noiselessly; her lips were parted. Mrs. Bunt watched all three, impartially.

Suddenly Minerva commenced coughing. Doug Hodges gave her a frowning look — one that asked with the impatience of a ten years' husband if she couldn't wait till the "Rochester Schottische" was finished. She put her hand on her chest and, still coughing, slipped out of the room.

Her mother gloomed after her for a moment; then she arose and followed her.

The Christmas dinner was eaten solemnly at three o'clock. There was a thick soup, made of canned oysters, with little rings of butter floating on top; there were two big roasted chickens with sage dressing; a dome of mashed potato with a pool of melted butter in its sunken crater; stewed pumpkins, stewed corn, pickled peaches and beans, brown gravy, mince pie and floating island, and crab-apple jelly — all trembling and glowing upon the table at the same time.

Minerva served her guests faithfully; but she ate little herself.

When the dishes had been washed and the floor swept, Mrs. Bunt stood the broom up stiffly

behind the kitchen door, while Minerva hung the dish-pan out on the porch and stretched the dish-cloth smoothly over it.

"Now, Lily Belle," said Mrs. Bunt, firmly, pulling down her sleeves, "we'll go in the settin'-room. Doug an' Minervy's a-goin' to take a walk."

"I'd just as soon go along with 'em, Mis' Bunt."

"Well, I guess they'd like to be alone a leetle while — on Christmas, too."

"We'd just as soon have her along of us," spoke up the young man, boldly, with a red face.

"Well, she'll set here with me. That's settled. Yuh 'n Minervy go on now. I'd laff if I'd have anybody tag me an' my girl around all day, if I was a young man."

"Why, the idee!" fluttered Lily Belle.

"Well, I w'u'd. I'd laff." She passed near Minerva. "The day's all set," she said in a stern whisper. "Has he told yuh? It's the first day o' May."

The girl's large eyes glowed out of her white face.

"Who set it?"

"I did."

The sunset was drawing its long beautiful ribbons out of the beryl skies and coiling them low in the west in splendid loops of color. A

strong wind was blowing up the arm; the waves pounded and broke upon the rocks.

Minerva walked silently by her lover's side. Once she shivered and drew her cape closer about her chest. Several times she coughed.

"You've got a cold, ain't choo?" said the young man at last, indifferently.

"No, only a cough."

He looked at her. "You've got thinner 'n when I was here last."

"It's been six months." Her voice sounded hollow. There was a drawn look about her mouth.

"It has? So long? Why, it didn't seem more 'n a month."

As he began to walk more slowly, she fell into his pace unconsciously, like an obedient dog.

"It seems like six years to me." The words ought to have shaken his soul — there was such a heartbreak in them.

"It all depends on the way you spend your time, I s'pose," he said. A smile came upon his mouth; his eyes smiled, too — as in memory of something sweet.

The girl saw. Her breath came with a sound that was almost a sob. She stopped suddenly and faced him. All her passion, all her heartbreak, all her despair broke loose in that second

and shook her so she could not speak. But her eyes spoke. Presently she got control, too, of her voice — poor, shaken thing that it was.

"Why don't yuh speak up?" she said, fiercely. "Why don't yuh tell me?"

"Why don't I tell yuh what?" He stared at her stupidly, the smile slowly leaving his face.

"That yuh're tired o' — o' bein' engaged to me." The words must have hurt. She pressed both hands hard upon her throat and coughed. "Why don't yuh tell me that yuh want her?"

He had the manhood to quail — and to insult her by no lie.

But before he could speak her passion had burned itself out. Her face worked strongly and tears leaped to her eyes, stinging. "Oh, Doug, Doug," she said, gently; "I w'u'dn't of had yuh for long, anyhow. Then yuh c'u'd of had her, an' I'd of been happy a little while first. It w'u'dn't of been more 'n a year — an' she's so well an' pretty, she c'u'd of waited. But it's all right. Yuh go an' have her, an' don't worry about me. I guess the worst part of it's over now. One thing, dyin' won't be ha'f so hard." She sank down upon a rock and turned her face down the arm — not blue now, but dull gray, like the sky from which all color was gone. "Yuh go in an' tell her. I guess I'll stay out here a while."

He stood still.

"Your — that is — your ma — "

"Oh!" she said, quickly. A quiver went across her face. "I forgot her. Oh, poor ma!" She arose and stood irresolute. Then she said, slowly — "I'll go in with yuh. We won't let her know till you 'n Lily Belle are gone. Then I'll tell her myself."

"She — she — "

"It'll be all right," she assured him, patiently. "She don't cross me in anything — since I got to coughin' so."

He turned back, then, with his head up and a glow on his face — the happiest coward that ever breathed God's air. She went swaying along beside him. The wind tore her cape from her chest. She coughed often. Her face was as bleak as the sea; but her soul shone like a steadfast star out of her beautiful eyes.

BELINDY'S ONE BEAU

"My! Don't Mount Baker look fine this morning!"

Mrs. Davenport stood by the kitchen window. Her left arm formed a perfect V, and the back of her hand rested upon her hip. There were callous spots in the palm thus turned upward, and the fingers were crooked and stiffened with hard work. In her hand was a hot-cake turner, which shone from many dexterous slidings between browned cakes and the buttered griddle.

"We didn't see no such mountains as that in Kanzas," she said, with a kind of grim satisfaction.

Belinda was washing dishes at a little home-made table. She set the cup she was washing back into the dish-pan, stripped the soap-suds from her reddened arms with her hands, and went to the window. Foamy flecks of suds dropped down her blue checked apron, and a pleasant vapor arose from her moist hands and arms.

She looked, over her mother's shoulder, at the noble snow-dome, swelling out of the fir-grown hills.

"How pink it looks," she said.

"Unh-hunh," said the older woman, breathing a sigh with no consciousness of the vague longing that gave it birth.

"Kind o' *purple*-pink," said Belinda; "like" — her eyelids fell a little over her deep eyes, giving them a far-sighted look — "like the dust on the blue grapes in California when the sun shines on 'em."

Mrs. Davenport laughed. It was a laugh as harsh and uncompromising as a hard life had made herself; but it held a touch of reluctant tenderness, nevertheless.

"You do beat all!" she said, turning to look at the girl who was breathing silently between parted lips. "Where on earth you git sech notions from I don't see! Not from your paw nor me, though, I can tell you that mighty quick. People that was bound out when they was childern back in Pennsylvany never had much time to think how dust looked on purple grapes. I ust to git up at three o'clock mornings an' milk twenty cows before breakfast — at least" — she corrected — "before *I* got any breakfast."

Belinda still looked at the mountain without speaking. She had heard the story of her mother's hard life so many times before.

"Then after I did get a bite o' breakfast,"

pursued Mrs. Davenport, in a reminiscent and injured tone, "it was work on the jump in the kitching till noontime; an' after dinner I had to go out in the field with the hands an' drop patatas, or hoe corn, or whatever there was to do. An' after supper" — bitterly — "twenty cows to milk again! Some of 'em had to be tied up to keep from kicking the pail over! There wa'n't much dust on blue grapes in *them* days!"

The girl turned silently and went back to her dish-washing.

"Fer gracious' sake!" exclaimed her mother, suddenly. "If here don't come the men-folks to breakfast, an' it not ha'f, ner near ha'f ready! Hurry up with them dishes, an' after this you see that you get all washed up the night before. Thank mercy, they have to wash theirselves at the sink! That'll give us five minutes longer. Why — there's somebody with 'em! Whoever in this world can be coming at this hour? Oh, I see now — it's the ingineer got back at last. My! what a big, fine-looking fellow he is."

The dishes clattered noisily in the draining-pan. One fell.

"Look out what you're doing, Belindy! You're so careless. Why, somebody's talking about you — your ear's just scarlet. It's your left ear, too; they're talking bad about you."

"I don't care," said the girl. She bent

her head a little lower. Her face was scarlet, too.

The men came up the three steps to the back porch. Mr. Davenport commenced pumping, from force of habit. The pump screaked discordantly. "This pump needs oilin'," he said, in a kind of mild surprise.

His son and the hired man looked at each other and smiled; they had heard the same remark delivered in the same surprised tone every morning of the past six months.

"Here, Mr. Sanderson, you wash first, an' then you can go in an' speak to the women folks." He pushed a basin of swaying water to the farther end of the sink; one little wave swelled high and toppled over the side. "You've been gone nigh onto a month, hain't you?"

John Sanderson came to the sink with the long, firm stride of the men who precede the great transcontinental railways — the men who are accustomed to forcing their way through unbroken forests and clambering along fearful precipices. He was, indeed, fine-looking. He rolled back the collar of his gray flannel shirt, showing a splendid brown throat that whitened down toward the shoulders and chest. Then he turned up his sleeves till a narrow strip of white flesh made a bracelet between the flannel and the brown of his wrist.

"Almost a month," he said, heartily, and plunged into the basin of sparkling water.

"Maw," called Mr. Davenport, beginning again on the raspy pump, "can't you give us a clean tow'l?"

"Oh, yaas — in a minute."

There were hurrying steps and then silence in the kitchen. The pleasant smell of cakes browning on a buttered griddle was borne out through the open door.

"Here's a towel, paw," said Mrs. Davenport, coming out suddenly. She walked with quick, short steps.

"Why, how are you, Mr. Sanderson? Back at last, are you? You stayed so long we was beginning to think you'd found a boarding-place more to your likes."

"Oh, no, indeed, Mrs. Davenport," replied Sanderson, burying his wet face in the towel and returning a compliment for her good-natured jest. "As long as my headquarters are here I wouldn't board with any one else if I got my board for nothing."

"Oh — *you!*" exclaimed Mrs. Davenport, blushing and bridling coquettishly. "Paw, d' you hear that? My land! That's the biggest compliment I've got to my cooking sence I was first married back in Kanzas. I notice women don't get many compliments after they've been married —"

"Maw," called Belinda, from within, "your cakes are burning."

"Pfew! Mercy! I should say so!" Mrs. Davenport hurried in. Sanderson followed her.

He went through the low-raftered kitchen, with its shining pans hanging on the walls, and into the small dining-room, where a pleasant jingle of forks and spoons told him that Belinda was "setting" the table. A window was open to the morning sun, and white muslin curtains were pushing in and out with a soft, swishing sound. A morning-glory vine swung white and purple bells in the light breeze. A butterfly lay on the window ledge with slowly throbbing wings. There was a delicious breath of lilacs in the room, too — but sweeter and fairer than all of these sweet and fair things was the young girl standing by the table in a pale blue cotton gown; with her brown curls tied back with a blue ribbon; with a face and throat like a creamy lily that has been touched by sunset; with lips that trembled a little, and the very gladdest eyes that ever looked out of a maiden's soul.

Sanderson went to her, smiling, and took her hand. There was a spoon in it, which he quietly removed with his left hand.

"Well," he said, as she did not speak, "are you glad to see me?"

"Of course," said the girl, very low. She drew her hand from his clasp, awkwardly and with a deeper color. A whiff of wind pushed the curtains far out into the room, and shook its freight of lilac sweets all about them.

"You'll go to the dance with me to-night?" said Sanderson, lowering his voice. "I hurried back especially for that."

Belinda felt her lashes sink suddenly to her burning cheek, hiding the swift, deep joy that flamed into her eyes.

"I don't know," she said, taking up a knife, and, in her embarrassment, dropping it on the floor. "I'll see what maw says to it. Where is it?"

"Down in Fairhaven — in the basement of the new grocery store. We would have to go down in a canoe — all alone, too, I guess. Would you be afraid?"

Would she be afraid? With him? Belinda almost laughed. But she answered indifferently — "I guess not. I'll see what maw says. Who's going?"

"Oh, all the boys of my party and a lot from Old Whatcom; I don't know what girls they're going to take."

"There are some new girls just come to Fairhaven," said Belinda.

"Breakfast's all ready!" cried Mrs. Daven-

port, bouncing in. She carried a large platter of fried ham and eggs carefully freckled on both sides. "Set right down, Mr. Sanderson. Belindy, you pour out, will you, while I get the pancakes?"

Belinda took the chair at the head of the table and commenced putting cream and sugar into the thick cups.

"What — on — earth," said her brother Tom, who sat beside her, "are you puttin' sugar into paw's cup fer?"

"Am I?" said Belinda, coloring deeply, unable to lift her eyes.

"Yes, you are. And now — look at you! I'm blamed if you ain't puttin' cream into mine. What's the matter of you all of a sudden this mornin'?"

"Talkin' about Fairhaven," said Mr. Davenport, balancing his knife with precision on the edge of his plate. "They've got six houses put up down there, an' a groc'ry store, an' a two-story hotel — to say nothin' of famblies that's livin' in shacks an' tents, waitin' for houses. I tell you, the boom's right on down there. Bennett's been up an' had a town meetin', an' he's goin' right ahead with the railroad. They're goin' to start up the old Eldredge mill, too, that's been layin' idle all these years. Mr. Sanderson, have a hot pancake."

"The good year of '89 will bring prosperity to Bellingham Bay," said Sanderson, significantly. "I suppose we haven't eight hundred people on the whole Bay to-day, but I'll bet my last red cent that in less than two years we'll have fifteen thousand. You know that lot on Holly street, opposite Quackenbush's — right in the stumps and fir trees? Well, I could have bought that two months ago for seven hundred and fifty dollars, and to-day it went to a Montana man for thirty-five hundred. How's that for a jump in two months?"

"You don't say!" Mr. Davenport looked excited and began to eat very fast. "Well, maw, all I've got to say is we've just everlastingly struck it at last. We come here in '62, an' we've had a hand-to-mouth time of it ever sence, but it kind o' looks now as if we're right in it."

"You don't ketch me objectin'," said Mrs. Davenport, facetiously. "I'm tired enough of log cabins an' rag carpets. I'm tired of working, too. Milking twenty cows before breakfast when you're a child, an' pitching hay in the harves' fields wa'n't meant for women's work, an' it stiffens up their joints most offul. It's a shame an' a disgrace to them I lived with the way I had to work — "

"Oh, cheese the racket," mumbled Tom, disrespectfully, under his breath.

"Where's the apple-sass, maw?" said Mr. Davenport. "I want some to top off on."

"Well, paw! can't you get along one meal without apple-sass?" She laughed in a superior way. "Belindy, see if there's a little cold left, will you? I know there ain't enough for a whole mess, but mebbe there's a plenty for your paw. I never! The idee of cold apple-sass on hot pancakes!"

"Maw," said Belinda, some time after breakfast, as she stood at the little kitchen table again washing dishes, "Mr. Sanderson wants me to go to the dance with him to-night."

"You don't say!" exclaimed Mrs. Davenport. She stopped on her way to the porch and stood looking at her daughter's back. In her hands was a large plate containing four prints of fresh butter, each swelled out on top in the disagreeably suggestive image of a cow.

"It's down in Fairhaven," added Belinda, hastily.

"Hunh!"

"It's in the basement of the new grocery store."

"Hunh!"

"And we'd have to go down in a canoe, I guess."

"Well," said Mrs. Davenport, at last, with a long breath, "that beats me!"

She went out on the porch and crossed the yard to the spring-house. She put the butter carefully in a cool corner, skimmed the evening's milk and set the cream away to sour, and then gathered together the empty milk-pans and plunged them into the spring to cool.

"That beats me," she said, with a look of grim pleasure. "I wonder what Mis' Randall'll say to that? Always a-talking about Elviry's beaux, an' where-all they take her to; an' then always a-winding up with — 'Well, how's Belindy getting along? Got any beau yet?' I said to her last time — sassy enough, too, — 'No, she ain't got any beau yet. She ain't the kind that picks up with everybody, trash an' all. She's the kind that only has one beau, an' him the right kind of a one.' I'm glad now I said it, even if it did give her a chance to say back, a-laffing — 'Well, she's a right long time a-gettin' him, ain't she?' I guess she'll remember what I said now. If Mr. Sanderson ain't the right kind, I'd like to know where they pick the right kind up at! A civil ingineer an' a college grad'yate, an' the perfect picter of health — sech shoulders an' chest, an' sech legs as he's got! An' he gets a hunderd an' fifty dollars a month an' his board. They say his folks is reel tyees back in the East, too."

She returned to the house, walking fast and holding her head high.

"Can I go, maw?" asked Belinda, with a little wistful break in her voice. "Elviry Randall's going, an' all the girls, I guess."

"Why, of course you can go — with a gentleman like Mr. Sanderson. I wonder what Mis' Randall'll have to say to that! Her Elviry's never had a beau yet that was anybody better 'n a hired man, or a rancher with his pun'kin patch mortgaged up to its eyebrows; an' she did have one that was a bar-keeper."

"Oh, maw," said the girl, blushing painfully; "don't talk that way. Mr. Sanderson don't mean anything like — like — that."

"Oh, he don't, don't he? Well, what does he mean, then? What does he want to go taking you to dances for, I'd like to know, if he don't want to be your beau? Just tell me that, will you, Missy."

"He don't mean that," repeated the girl very earnestly, as if trying to convince herself. She found it difficult to speak calmly. There was a pulse beating away in her throat, and she felt as if she must put up her hand to stop it. "He just wants to be friendly — that's all."

"He always was friendly," replied her mother, stubbornly. She crushed a newspaper and began rubbing vigorously at the tiny, brown blisters the

frying ham had sputtered upon the stove. "He didn't have to ask you to go to a dance just to be friendly, did he? Asking a girl to go to a dance meant something when I was a girl back in Pennsylvany."

"It don't mean anything now, maw," said Belinda, very low, but with pulses seeming to beat all through her body — feeling her very fingers grow larger with the pulses beating in them.

"Well, we'll see."

Mrs. Davenport took one lid off the top of the stove and, after flourishing the blackened newspaper over the hearth once more, tossed it into the coals and replaced the lid. She went out to the sink, dipped some water out of the rain-barrel and carefully cleansed her hands; she used mottled Castile soap and a long, coarse towel with blue stripes at the edges; then she took off her big apron and pinned her dress at the throat. She went across the yard, stooped through an opening in the fence, and was in her neighbor's back yard.

Mrs. Randall was "shelling" peas. Her kitchen door was open. She looked up when Mrs. Davenport reached the porch.

"I expected that was you," she said, putting on a pleased look. "You'll excuse my not gettin' up, I know, with all these peas in my lap. Set

right down. I'm awful glad you run over. Any noos?"

"There ain't none that I know of. My! Ain't ev'rything booming, though? I guess we're going to have good times this year."

"Yes, an' just look at that Fairhaven — the way it's a-shootin' up! Several noo buildings; an' lots of fine people a-comin' in there."

"Is that so?"

"Why, yes. Ain't you heard? They're a-havin' high times down there — dances an' all sorts of — society."

"I heard a little," admitted Mrs. Davenport, with a fine indifference.

Mrs. Randall split a pale green pod with her broad thumb and sent the peas rattling down into the pan. "You have to look peart to keep up with these times," she said, with some condescension.

"Yes," said her visitor, meekly.

"I suppose you ain't even heard about the dance down in the basement o' the noo grocery store."

"Well, I did hear something about that," admitted Mrs. Davenport, with caution.

"Elviry's goin'. It's goin' to be some pun'kins, I guess, from all I hear. Waxed floor an' two fiddles an' a caller off. Elviry's goin'; there's b'en two or three after her." The peas

dropped with a softened sound now into the pan.

Mrs. Davenport put one knee over the other, crossed her wrists, and looked at her neighbor, smiling kindly. "Is she going with the bar-keeper?" she said, pleasantly. "Or the barber, or the hired man? Really, you must excuse the question — Elviry has so many beaux! I guess the girls all feel jealous of her."

"Do they?" Mrs. Randall studied her guest suspiciously. She did not like her tone, although the words seemed so unenvious. "Well, Elviry always did seem to take with the young men. She 's had more 'n her share o' chances, if I do say it myself."

"Yes, indeed," said Mrs. Davenport, smiling. She picked up a pod that had fallen on the floor and polished it with her rough thumb. "There was" — slowly — "the barber, an' two hired men, an' the butcher — the one that 'tended to his own slaughtering, wa'n't it, Mis' Randall? — an' the bar-keeper — what a pity it was he got drunk so often an' was so no account! Yes, Elviry's had more chances 'n most girls."

"There was more than them," said Mrs. Randall, huffily. "There was the preacher, Mis' Davenport; an' there was Mr. Nelson, an' there was Mr. Fielding that owns the best ranch on Lake Whatcom, an' just a-dyin' for Elviry."

Mrs. Davenport laughed now without effort. "How you do joke, Mis' Randall," she said. "That poor preacher! I have to laff every time I think of him. He wa'n't worth his salt. He didn't get three hunderd dollars a year, an' his congre'ation went to sleep right in the middle of his sermons. An' Mr. Fielding — I guess you'd have to pay his mortgage off for him if Elviry took a notion to him. His ranch is mortgaged for more 'n it's worth; we've got first mortgage on it ourselves. You didn't know it? Well, you have to look peart to keep up with these times. An' as for Mr. Nelson — I always felt sorry for the way he treated Elviry. Never looked at her after that widow come here an' just up an' married her off-hand."

"Elviry wouldn't have him!" Mrs. Randall flung the words out between her teeth. Her face was crimson. The peas were spurting in all directions now. "He ast her over an' over. You needn't to waste your sympathy on my girl, Mis' Davenport. You keep it for your Belindy! *Belindy!*" — she laughed shrilly — "Who ever offered hisself to your Belindy? Who ever wanted to take her anywheres? Who, for instance, as you ast me about Elviry, is a-goin' to take her to the dance tonight?"

Mrs. Davenport picked up another pod and

began polishing it leisurely. "Mr. Sanderson is," she said.

The downdrop of peas was interrupted. Mrs. Randall's thumb paused in the very act of splitting a stubborn pod. She lifted two startled eyes to her neighbor's complacent face. Mrs. Davenport's bomb had done its deadly work, as the newspapers say.

"Mr. Sanderson!" faltered Mrs. Randall. "Not the civil ingineer?"

"Yes." Mrs. Davenport nodded cheerfully. "The civil ingineer. He's been boarding at our house nigh onto six months, an' I can see now that he's been paying attention to Belindy in a quiet way all the time; but my! she's so perticular that it never come into my head, nor into paw's head, either, that they was a-setting their caps at each other. But it all come out plain enough this morning."

The peas commenced their music in the pan again, but with less spirit.

"Of course," continued Mrs. Davenport, still with that aggravating cheerfulness, "we wouldn't 'a' let her go with every one. Not that there was any danger of her wanting to — she held her head so high! But we couldn't object to Mr. Sanderson."

There was a silence. Two or three peas rattled over the floor.

"There ain't no such match as him ever been on the Bay. Belindy's been a-waiting for the best. Nothing else 'u'd do her. He's a college grad'yate, an' he's of a toney fambly. He's Bennett's right-hand man on the railroad; an' he gits a *hunderd an' fifty dollars a month an' his board.*"

Mrs. Randall looked at her visitor feebly.

"Well, I must run back. Belindy won't know where I'm at. I just come over to talk about how things is a-booming on the Bay. Mercy me! I wonder what they'd say back in Kanzas if they could see towns a-growing from a hunderd to a thousand people a week! An' that's what Whatcom's doing. Good-day, Mis' Randall; I hope Elviry'll have a good time to-night."

Mrs. Randall stood up gingerly and set the peas on the table. There was a flush on her thin face, and a bewildered look in her eyes.

"Well, good-day," she said, weakly. She was completely out of countenance and, probably for the first time in her life, nervous. She pulled down first one sleeve and then the other, with an awkward pretence of indifference; and kept pulling at them after they had given warnings that they could come no further. "Run in ag'in, Mis' Davenport."

"Yes, I will. You come over whenever you

can, Mis' Randall. Don't stop to dress yourself up, but just run in the back way an' be neighborly."

"Well, I will."

Mrs. Davenport smiled as she stooped through the opening in the fence. "Every dawg has his day," she said, with satisfaction, "an' I guess this is mine."

At half-past eight o'clock that evening John Sanderson, with one magnificent, deep-chested sweep of his powerful arms, sent his oars ploughing through the water and drove his boat high on the Fairhaven beach. Belinda was sitting in the stern of the skiff. She was dressed in a pink sateen, made with many plaited ruffles. It fitted badly, but it could not conceal the lovely lines of her figure. She had gathered it up about her with a somewhat conscious coquettishness, disclosing a white muslin petticoat adorned with several wide, crocheted ruffles. It was starched so stiffly that it rustled when she moved. There was a little water in the bottom of the boat, and one fold of the white skirt had found it and nestled into it. But Belinda was not to be annoyed by small things like that.

She wore a pink velvet bow in her soft, brown curls, and a strip of pink velvet around her delicate, beating throat, — beating with a strange,

sweet fright that kept her pulses startled and her lips dumb. She wore much cheap jewelry and many bangles.

The sun was setting, and her deep eyes were turned toward the West in still ecstasy. The bay was like a great Safrano rose, each wave an upcurling, hollowed petal, paling from its edge's rich copper-pink to a delicate green at the centre. The sky flaring above was of a warm salmon color. Low in the west clouds were piled loosely, each on each, making tall columns of pearl, edged with fire; and through these the sun sank, vibrating and luminous, to the sea.

Sanderson sat with the oars in his hands. The boat was half in the water and half on the beach. The flowing tide lifted it a little higher with each swell. The light waves spoke and kissed around its sides. He held the oars slanting to the water; the drops, running in linked chains along their edges, turned to fire-opals when the sun touched them.

"It is beautiful," said Sanderson, smiling at her. She gave him a brief, sweet glance and looked away again.

"Well," he said, drawing a deep breath through his splendid lungs, "I have seen sunsets in the Selkirks, the Cascades, the Rockies, and on the Hudson, the Gulf of Mexico, and the Mediterranean — yes, and on the awful plains; but I

have never seen anything to equal a night like this on Puget Sound."

"Oh, I am glad," said the girl. Her chin sunk into the palm of her hand. Her lips were warm and moist, and curled apart like the lips of a sea-shell. There was a delicious pushing movement to the boat — dreamy and rhythmic.

"I guess we'll have to go, though," said Sanderson, drawing in the oars. The boat rocked as he stepped out of it. He pulled it further up the beach. It grated raspingly upon the gravel. Belinda arose reluctantly, and shook her pretty pink ruffles over the white petticoat.

"I hate to go in," she said. There was a wistfulness in her eyes.

"Let me lift you out," said Sanderson, putting his arm around her; "so your dress will not be draggled."

He lifted her with quite a business-like air, as if it were really the only sensible way of getting her out; but she trembled suddenly with delirious sweetness.

The ball-room was long and narrow, unceiled and low-raftered. It was dimly lighted by lamps and lanterns hung unevenly upon the walls. On a small platform three feet above the floor two "fiddlers" were grinding out a waltz. One played with his eyes closed; both kept time with their feet.

Ten couples were waltzing. Gliding in and out among them was a youth in a pepper-and-salt suit and a pink tie, scattering shavings from a wax candle. Ranged around the sides of the room on benches those who had come only as "spectators" sat with stiff, straight backs; the walls behind them were of unplaned boards which threatened disaster to all best dresses coming in contact with them.

"Come on," said Sanderson, with an amused laugh; "we can't miss this waltz."

Belinda glided into the circle of his arm and their warm palms melted together. Happiness sat so sweetly heavy upon her eyes that their gentle lids were weighed over them, hiding their tenderness.

Where now are the twin cities of Whatcom and Fairhaven had been but a handful of "shacks" on one side, and the noble sweep of blue sea on the other, when Belinda's parents toiled across the plains in ox-wagons from Kansas, and built a log cabin in the fir woods. Here, a few years later, Belinda was born, and here she had always lived. She had attended the district school in winter; and it was her father's

boast that he had "give Belindy an edication as good as the best of 'em."

The girl had loved Sanderson almost from the first moment of her acquaintance with him; but she had not suspected it herself until he went away. He had paid her no attention, to be sure, but then he was not like other men — and at least he paid no attention to other girls. He spent all his spare time with the family, usually playing cards with Belinda in a quiet corner; and he always spoke gently to her and was so thoughtful of her comfort. She was sure that he lowered his voice when he spoke to her sometimes; and that once his hand shook when it accidentally touched hers. Several times he had brought her rare wild flowers from the depths of the forest; they were pressed in a copy of Longfellow that she kept in her tiny room up in the "loft."

She thought and dreamed of all these things while he was away, but not until to-day had she allowed herself to believe fully in his love for her. Not until to-day had she given herself to the full ecstasy of her love for him.

In spite of her soft contradiction of her mother's assertion that "asking a girl to go to a dance meant something," in her heart she believed that it did. In her small world a young man never thought of proffering the slightest attention

to a young woman unless he did "mean something." . . . So to-night she was happy.

Perhaps some of the innocent fire throbbing in the girl's veins warmed Sanderson's pulses; for presently he bent his head till she felt his breath on her temples and said — "Why, this is the jolliest waltz I ever had."

"Is it?" trembled Belinda.

"Yes, it is," he answered, honestly.

Then the music stopped and with it the sliding of feet. With flushed faces, much laughter and noisy bantering the dancers found seats. Sanderson seated Belinda, and joined a group of young men who stood awkwardly, pulling their mustaches and casting surreptitious glances around the room in search of partners.

"Take yer pardners fer a plain querdrille!" yelled the caller, and instantly there was a rush and a scramble. One or two young men secured desirable places on the floor at one leap and then signalled to the young women they had already engaged to join them.

There was a delay and a murmur of complaint. One young fellow climbed on a bench.

"You'll have to come up an' buy yer numbers," he shouted, "before you dance this set. Leave yer girls on the floor an' walk right up. Only a dollar an' a half a number, supper an' all."

Belinda had gone out to dance with some one, and now looked around timidly for Sanderson. He was in the next set, dancing with a girl she had never seen before. And what a beautiful girl! She was looking up into his face with the most coquettish eyes poor Belinda could imagine. She was an olive-complexioned brunette. She had a fine figure. Her dress was of creamy nun's-veiling that clung stylishly to her limbs and fitted exquisitely.

The feeling of exalted passion in Belinda's heart melted in sharp and bitter pain. She looked down at her pink, ruffled dress, and hated it; at her cheap, bangled bracelets, and hated them. She could have torn them off and stamped on them. This girl he was dancing with — she wore no cheap jewelry. There was a string of pearls around her slender throat, and that was all. No ruffles on her dress and not over-much material in it; and yet how stylish and distinguished she looked! As much out of place at that country dance as — as Sanderson himself, the girl thought with a sudden, torturing bitterness. She stood, crimson and miserable, realizing for the first time how ill-dressed she was, how country-bred, how unlike this other girl.

"Honors to yer pardners!" shouted the clarion voice of the caller. "Alley-mande-left!"

As she clasped hands with the young man on

her right, Sanderson, "alley-mande-lefting" in the adjoining set, passed close to her.

"The next waltz," he whispered, bending his head. "Don't forget; I must have it."

His face was radiant. Hope sprung up in her heart again. She had just time to nod, with a smile that was almost pathetic in its sudden joy, before he disappeared among the dancers.

She thought — "How foolish of me" — "First four right an' left!" — "to be ready to give up because he danced with another girl! It's only" — "Sass-shay!" yelled the caller — "a quadrille, anyhow, an' he's asked me" — "Right hand to pardner, gran' right an' left!" — "for another waltz." "Balance to yer pardner!" — "I wonder if she puts her hands on his shoulders when she swings" — "Swing on the corner!" — "She didn't get to swing with him that time!" — "Promenade all!"

So the dancing and Belinda's thoughts went rushing on to the music of the violins and the rhythm of tireless feet. When it was over Sanderson brought his partner and seated her beside Belinda.

"Don't forget my waltz, Belinda," he said. "It will be only the second. We must have more than that — waltzes, I mean; I don't care for other dances."

He went away then. The young men had

gathered around the door again, mopping their faces with colored silk handkerchiefs and breathing heavily.

Most of the girls sat giggling and fanning themselves furiously. From time to time they sent inviting glances to the group at the door. The fiddlers were "tuning up." Somebody opened a window and the soft sea-wind came in.

"Oh, how delightful," said a sweet voice at Belinda's side. "The breeze is straight from the ocean."

"Yes," blushed Belinda. She trembled with embarrassment.

"All take pardners fer a waltz!"

"Belinda," said Sanderson, resting his strong arm around her waist and speaking low, "you are the dearest little girl in the world, and I believe you like me; don't you?"

"A little," said the girl, with unconscious coquetry. Her heart struggled against his arm.

"Enough to do something to make me happy forever?"

"I don't know — maybe." The pulse was beating awfully now in her throat.

"Well, I am going to ask something of you when we go home to-night, and you must make up your mind that you will not disappoint me. And I want every waltz to-night, Belinda. I'll tell you why when we go home."

"And I was jealous of *her*," thought Belinda, and her heart swelled with a great tenderness.

It was two o'clock when Sanderson pushed the boat down into the water and sprang to the oars. It was a soft, still night. There was no moon, but the stars shone like silver lamps in the blue distances above.

For a long time neither spoke. The oars cut, hissing, through the water, and the waves rippled around the prow.

Belinda sat in the stern of the boat, waiting, in a happiness too deep for speech.

At last Sanderson spoke.

"Belinda," he said, "you saw the girl I danced the first quadrille with?"

"Yes," said Belinda. She pressed her palms together in her lap and sat motionless.

"I knew her in the East. I was engaged to her. But we had a misunderstanding. I was at fault, and she never forgave me. She laughs at me when I entreat her to forgive me, and pretends to be indifferent and coquettish. But she loves me as deeply as I love her, Belinda, and we are both breaking our hearts, apart."

He paused, but Belinda did not speak.

"I knew her father was coming to Fairhaven

— he had some inside information from the railroad people. That was why I came here, Belinda — and waited."

"Yes," said Belinda.

"That was why I never noticed other girls, Belinda — why I stayed at home evenings, and never went out like other fellows. I was true to my sweetheart; you know that, Belinda."

"Yes," said Belinda; "I know."

"Belinda," said Sanderson, earnestly, "I want you to help me make her jealous. I believe that is the only thing that will break her pride. That's why I asked you to go to the dance with me, Belinda, and why I danced every waltz with you, when I was wild to dance them with her — just to have my arm around her once more and feel her soft breath. Belinda, don't refuse me."

He had stopped rowing. They were nearing the wharf. Belinda heard the water pushing around the barnacled piles.

"I don't understand," said the girl. "What is it you are asking of me? I can't understand. Everything seems —"

"To make her jealous, Belinda. To go everywhere with me, and dance with me, and — oh, make her think that you like me and that I like you."

He steered the boat between the piles that

some tide-land jumper had driven. Belinda saw how black the water was where the shadows were deepest, and shivered unconsciously.

"I don't believe I could do that," she said.

"Oh, Belinda!" Sanderson got down on his knees in the boat and took both her hands, — they were cold but not trembling. "Don't refuse me. I have set my heart on this as my last hope. If you only knew her, Belinda! How good and gentle she is! She has a little blind brother, and she is a very angel to him. And she is so kind to her parents — and to poor people — to every one but me! She was not true to herself to-night; she was pretending to be light and indifferent. But she was pale, Belinda."

"Was she?" said poor Belinda. "She spoke to me once; her voice was sweet."

"Aye," said Sanderson, "it is sweet. Belinda, Belinda — "

"I'll tell you to-morrow," said the girl, shivering. "Let's go home — I'm awful cold."

The cocks crew as they entered the yard. Half-way up the rhododendron path, Belinda turned to Sanderson.

"What is her name?" she asked, and she shivered again.

"June," said Sanderson, softly; "June Charman."

"It's a pretty name," said the girl, going on to the house.

"Maw," said Belinda the next morning, when she and her mother were alone together in the kitchen, "I've got something to tell you."

"Well, out with it."

Belinda was making tarts. Mrs. Davenport was working freshly churned butter with a little curved ladle. She stopped abruptly and looked at her daughter.

"I can guess what you got to tell." She gave her head a little toss. "I only wish Mis' Randall was here to hear it."

"It ain't anything she'd want to hear," said Belinda, hurriedly; "and I know you can't guess, maw. It's —"

"Well, jest you give me a chance to try, Missy. The real fact is, Belindy, I've always b'en worried about gitting you settled. You don't seem to take with young men. Of course I never said anything to you about it before, but now it can't hurt your feelin's none. A girl that's druv her chickens to sech a market needn't care whether she took with other 'ns or not. I've held my head mighty high over it, but it's rankled an' rankled — offul. An' that Mis' Randall has

said such spiteful things; an' then to think of a man like Mr. San —"

"Maw," interrupted Belinda, sharply, "just listen. He's engaged to — to a girl in Fairhaven; that is, he used to be, and he wants to be again."

"What's that?" Mrs. Davenport sat motionless. Her eyes were opened wide and her face was pale.

"I say he used to be engaged to a girl in the East, and she's just come to Fairhaven. He's trying to make up with her — they fell out about something or other — and he wants me to help him."

"An' he wants you to help him!" Mrs. Davenport's pallor was giving place to the color of a star-fish. "How does he want you to help him?"

"He wants me to make her jealous."

"He wants you to make her jealous, does he?" Mrs. Davenport arose and set the wooden bowl on the stove-hearth. "Belindy Davenport, you turn around here so's I can see your face. Are you telling me the truth in that ca'm way, or is this one o' your fool tricks?" Her voice broke on the last words.

Belinda faced her resolutely.

"It's the truth, maw. It's the honest truth.

He only asked me to go to the dance to make her jealous; he said so himself."

"He said so hisself, did he? An' you're standing there a-telling me that to my face! You ain't got a speck o' spunk or git-up about you, or you wouldn't be taking it that way! After him a-making us believe he wanted to be your beau — "

"Oh, maw, he didn't — "

"Yes, he did, too. 'N' after me a-telling Mis' Randall all about it — an' about his being a college grad'yate, an' gitting a hunderd an' fifty dollars a month an' his board."

"Oh, maw!" Belinda was white as death now. "You didn't say anything to Mis' Randall, did you? I told you he didn't mean anything."

"Well, I didn't believe you. She's always a-bragging about her Elviry havin' so many beaux, so I just went right over an' up an' told her about Mr. Sanderson wanting to be your'n."

"Oh, how could you — how could you?"

Belinda sat down helplessly. Her eyes had a strained look.

Her mother looked at her and her countenance softened. "Belindy," she said, "you're pretending you don't care, but you do care — an' that's a good sight more to me than what Mis' Randall'll say when she hears."

For a moment the girl was tempted to go to her mother and lay her head on her breast and sob her heart out. Then she shrank a little closer into her chair; her shoulders drooped listlessly; her head sunk with a movement of despair.

Her mother bent over her and touched her hair with fingers that were tender notwithstanding their roughness.

"Just tell me what I can do to help you, Belindy. I'd always hoped you'd have a happier life 'n I'd had; but I guess there ain't much chance fer women out here 'n the backwoods." She sighed — unconsciously, but it was a sigh that helped the girl as nothing else could have done. She lifted her head and shoulders, and smiled with brave lips.

After a moment she stood up by the table and began dropping jelly again into the golden rims. She held the spoon firmly.

"I'll get along all right, maw," she said, gently. "I'll help him make up with her, and they'll never know anything about it. She's pretty — and sweet; and he'll be a good deal happier with her than he'd have been with me — even if he'd thought about it."

She opened the oven door and put her hand inside to test its heat. As she arose her eyes came level with the window. Far away at the

top of the blue hills, pushing aside a veil of purple mist, Mount Baker swelled, white and glistening, into an apricot sky. The noble majesty of that lonely dome touched the girl's soul. A look of exaltation came upon her face — the victory of the soul over the passions.

MIS' BUNNELS'S FUNERAL

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"Ma! Ma! Oh, *ma!* Where are you?"

"Here," said Mrs. Torrance. She was stooping to put a pan of biscuits in the oven. She held one floury hand over them to test the heat. "What you making such an all-fired fuss about?"

"Mis' Bunnels is dead an' her little boy 's come up to see if you can't come down reel quick and lay her out. He's a-crying."

"My mercy!" Mrs. Torrance stood up, tall and spare, and looked at her daughter. The swift internal struggle to assume an expression suitable to the occasion brought a flush to her thin cheeks. The young girl returned her look in large-eyed suspense. She held one hand on her flat chest, breathing excitedly but noiselessly. "Tell him I'll come down direckly — *direckly!* My, ain't that awful! All them little childern, too!"

She sunk upon a chair weakly. Her face was as gray as ashes. "Belle Squiers," she said, when the girl, still trying to quiet the unwonted fluttering of her chest, came back, "how many childern 'd she hev? Five, wa'n't it?"

"No, ma; six."

"Ain't that awful? An' him as onery as anything. Stingy! I don't suppose the poor creature has a decent set o' underclo's to lay her out in. That's her own fault, though, for she *was* shif'less. Belle Squiers, if I sh'u'd die of a sudden, you'll find a nice outfit in the bottom tray of the brass-bound trunk up in the attic. I believe in being provided. But she was so shif'less. Not that I was ever caught a-saying anything ag'in anybody after they're dead. Belle Squiers, did you ask what she died with?"

"Oh, I fergot!"

"Mercy, child, you'll ferget your head yet. Well, I'll go right down. You'll hev to step around spry an' fix your pa's dinner. Don't ferget them biscuits in the oven. There's a dish o' smear-case out in the cellar. An' there's a plenty of scriddlings to warm over. Now, be sure you git the skim-milk an' don't interfere with the cream. If I ain't home by nine o'clock you'll know I've stayed all night. I wonder what minister they'll hev! She was a Luthern — an' there ain't no Luthern minister nearder 'n Tacoma. Mr. Bunnels 'u'd never go to that expense."

She stepped into a small bedroom that opened into the kitchen, and hurriedly combed her hair and put on her black alpaca dress — second best.

She returned to the kitchen, tying her bonnet-strings. "Belle Squiers, you fix this bow proper, will you? My fingers ain't as soople as they used to be. I'm all trembly, too, now. My knees feel as if they was about to give way. Now, let me see. Oh, yes! You tell your pa to clean up the spring-wag'n fer the fun'ral. He'd best run it right down into the crick an' wash it good. An' he'd best let the curtains all down an' wash them, too; they was a perfect disgrace to us at Mis' Wells's fun'ral. An' the wheels 'ad ought to be greased, so 's they won't squeak going down that long graveyard hill. I was so mortified by 'em at Mis' Wells's fun'ral — everybody kep' looking around so! Tell him I want he sh'u'd put in four seats. There's enough gray blankets to go on 'em. They're in the chist up-stairs."

"Which chist, ma?"

"W'y, the green one we brought across the plains with us — with the leather handles! Fer pity's sake! Belle Squiers, don't you know where I keep the bedclo's yet? What makes you ac' the dunce so? Foolhead! What 'u'd become o' you if I'd drop off? There — I guess I'm all ready."

She walked toward the door, but suddenly stopped and stood in a ruminating attitude. "Just as like as not," she said, in a kind of

quelled excitement, "that Mis' Bailey's heerd it an' 'll git there an' lay her out ahead o' me! It's just like her to up an' push herself in where she ain't wanted. Her taste is harrible about such things — the way she laid old Miss Hicks out was a shame. Twisted her neck to one side to make her look *keerless!* I wonder Mr. Hicks let her."

"You'd best hurry up, ma."

"Well, they've sent for me to lay Mis' Bunnels out," said Mrs. Torrance, closing her lips with decision, "an' I'm going to do it. If Mis' Bailey's been an' done it ahead o' me, I'll do 't all over ag'in to suit my own taste — that's all there is to it!"

She kissed the girl's unresponsive mouth in a grim, compulsory way, and went down the path, stiffly and rapidly. She looked neither to the right nor to the left. At the bars she paused abruptly and turned.

"Belle Squiers! Belle Squiers!"

"What?" said the girl, appearing at the door with a shining tin plate in her hands.

"Call the dog back."

"How?"

Mrs. Torrance lifted her voice shrilly. "I say, call the dog back, will you? Are you gone deef?"

She let down one bar and stooped gingerly

under the others. Then she gathered up her dress with a determined air and stepped on her way. The girl called — "Hyer, Jack! Hyer, Jack! Hyer, hyer!"

The Bunnels' home, noted for its shiftlessness, had taken on a look of majesty. The front door was closed. An imposing crape streamer hung motionless from the knob. For once all the dark green shades were lowered over the windows. Even the yellow dog sitting on the steps had a look of dignity, freshly put on for the occasion.

Several "neighbor men" stood in one corner of the yard, talking in subdued and mysterious tones. The lower sash of one of the parlor windows was lifted about four inches. Mrs. Torrance didn't like "the looks" of it. It seemed significant. She quickened her steps, going around the house to the back door. She bowed mournfully as she passed the group of men. She gave a solemnly surreptitious glance to each window as she passed.

As she stepped on the back porch, carefully letting down her dress skirt, the door opened, swiftly but noiselessly. Mrs. Bailey appeared. There was a basin in her hand and an expression of mingled importance and command on her face.

She started at sight of Mrs. Torrance and said — "Oh!" Her tone and look could not have been considered altogether expressive of pleasure. The two women looked at each other steadily. The lines of determination deepened around Mrs. Torrance's mouth. Mrs. Bailey had paused so suddenly that the water in the basin swayed up to the brim in a bulk; a little of it leaped over and splashed down at Mrs. Torrance's feet. It worked like a challenge.

"I've come to lay Mis' Bunnels out," she said, with firmness.

Mrs. Bailey stood her ground. She smiled solemnly — one of those spectral smiles that are seen only at funerals; her lips drew backward, but every other feature sternly protested that no smile was intended. In a second her face was as if the smile and the protest had never been.

"It's all done," she said. At any other time one would have said that her tone was triumphant.

"Done!" repeated Mrs. Torrance, sternly. "Who's pushed theirselves in an' done it?"

"I have." The smile came again and lingered longer than before.

"Well, she wanted I sh'u'd do it. They *sent after* me a-purpose to come an' do it."

"Well," said Mrs. Bailey, in a tone that was meant to put an end to the matter, "it's all done. I got here first an' done it."

She threw out the water and set the basin on a bench, leaning it on the edge to drain.

"Won't you come in?" she said, civilly, feeling that she was mistress of the situation, and, until the funeral, the house as well.

"That's what I come fer," said Mrs. Torrance, haughtily.

She walked into the kitchen, removed her wraps and hung them methodically on pegs in one corner. Then she said, briefly — "Where's Mis' Bunnels at?"

"She's in the parlor. I wouldn't go in right off, if I was you — Mr. Bunnels an' the childern 's in there, a-taking on."

Mrs. Torrance's curiosity got the better of her indignation.

"A-taking on!" she repeated, in a whisper. "Him! I guess not. What 'id she die with?"

Mrs. Bailey's face took on a look of mystery and subtle suggestion. "That's what we don't none of us know," she said, taking up the stove-hook and tracing imaginary letters on the stove with it. "I reckon Mr. Bunnels hisself don't know. There was nobody here but him an' the childern. This stove ain't been blacked fer *months* — it's all foxy! It was mighty sudden."

There was a silence. Then Mrs. Bailey leaned toward her neighbor and said, sinking her voice

to a whisper — "She didn't so much as have a decent set o' underclo's to lay her out in!"

"I want to know!" whispered back Mrs. Torrance. Her breath came with noiseless regularity. She sat down and crossed one knee over the other. Her large foot pumped up and down slowly and mechanically.

"I had to send Janie a-slying home to get my own set that was put away to lay myself out in. The idee o' not having such things all provided beforehand!"

"It's no more 'n I expected. It's what I said to Belle Squiers. What dress 'id you put on her?"

"W'y, I had to put on that old weddin'-dress o' her 'n." Mrs. Bailey's voice was fierce with contempt; evidently her joyful task had had its bitters. "Old as Methusalum, an' all faded in streaks! Had to cut the basque behind to git it on. I wanted he sh'u'd go an' git some white alpacky, but he w'u'dn't! 'D you ever hear tell o' anything so *mean?* It w'u'dn't of cost over five dollars or so. I went an' got a white lace fishy, an' had it booked to him. He can put that in his pipe an' smoke it."

"I don't consider that white alpacky 'u'd of been proper," said Mrs. Torrance, firmly. Her feeling of injury was returning, now that her curiosity was partially gratified.

"Well, that's what 'u'd of gone on her if he

hadn't of been so plegged stingy," said Mrs. Bailey, calmly. "I've see close people before, but I never did see — "

She interrupted herself with a violent start and commenced dusting the stove-hearth vigorously with the corner of her apron.

"I do' know exactly what to have for dinner," she was saying when a second later the door opened and Mr. Bunnels entered. Mrs. Torrance got up and shook hands with him stiffly and solemnly. Neither spoke until the silence grew embarrassing; then, Mrs. Torrance said — "Pfew! It's awful warm in here, ain't it?" Mr. Bunnels agreed that it was and went on out toward the stable.

"Here comes Mis' Grimm," announced Mrs. Bailey, peering out the window. She held the dotted calico curtain cautiously aside and flattened her cheek against the window-frame. "I don't see what *she's* comin' fer! She wa'n't no intimate o' Mis' Bunnels's."

"Mebbe she's come to lay her out," suggested Mrs. Torrance, with dry sarcasm. "Some persons alwus push theirselves in so where they ain't wanted. Oh, Mis' Grimm! It's you, is it?" she added, in a tone of sepulchral surprise as the lady entered noiselessly, on broad tiptoe.

"My!" whispered Mrs. Grimm, beginning to untie her bonnet strings from beneath her per-

spiring double chin, "ain't it jest awful about Mis' Bunnels? I dropped everything an' *run* as soon 's I heerd it! But I reckon father'll know enough to come over here an' git somethin' to eat when he sees there ain't nothin' at home."

"There ain't overly much room here fer comp'ny to eat in," said Mrs. Bailey with chill politeness and a hard face.

"Oh, that's all right, Mis' Bailey." Mrs. Grimm spoke quite cheerfully. "We don't ask things to be jest so at such times. I'll go right in an' lay her out while you're a-gittin' the dinner."

"She's all laid out." Mrs. Bailey spoke with a kind of fierceness. She began to fill the tea-kettle, walking back and forth between the stove and the water-bucket with long, determined steps; there was determination in the very rush of the water from the dipper into the kettle.

"All laid out!" echoed Mrs. Grimm, weakly. Her countenance fell.

Mrs. Torrance got up from her chair. She gave Mrs. Grimm a significant look. "Let's go in an' survey the remains, Mis' Grimm," she said.

They went into the adjoining room. Mrs. Torrance closed the door securely. She clutched Mrs. Grimm's sleeve and commenced whisper-

ing excitedly. She trembled with indignation. "Did you ever hear o' such a piece o' *brass*, Mis' Grimm? They sent for me *a-special* to come an' lay Mis' Bunnels out, an' I hurried with all my power, an' when I got here — if she hadn't up an' done it ahead o' me. She ain't got a par*tick*le o' taste in such things, 'ither!"

"About as much as a hen!"

They went into the darkened "best room" and stood for a time in silence looking down at the poor, tired, dead woman. For the first time since her girlhood there was a look of rest — glad, unfretting rest — on her thin face. Her clumsy hands, knotted with toil, and the bony wrists were folded stiffly over her flat waist — folded forever from the awful cares of a farmer's wife! No more floors to scrub, or bread to bake, or butter to churn! No more threshers to cook for in the burning summer noons! No more money to beg for with hesitating lips and hopeless eyes — only to be refused! Done forever with all toil and all passion and all despair!

Her coarse, graying hair had been drawn with painful tightness away from her face. The old, dove-colored wedding-dress, faded in streaks according to the severe folds in which it had lain out of sight all these years, added a touch of pathos that ought to have broken the husband's

heart. It and the poor, work-roughened hands and the look of new, unutterable rest — what a story they told!

It was a story that appealed to the two women, although they did not realize it. At the moment, they were conscious only that some things were not arranged in harmony with their own taste in such matters. With whispers, set faces, and surreptitious glances toward the closed door, they rearranged the dress, the hair, the flowers — even the quiet hands.

"Not a flower in her hands!" whispered Mrs. Torrance. "Did you ever? We'll put this big cally lily in her hand. Ain't it a nice big one? That old wedding-dress! Ain't he stingy, though?"

"Stingy's no name fer 't. I hear her beg him fer a dollar one day, an' he cries out — 'Dollar! Where's that dollar I give you last week? D' you think I'm *made* out o' dollars — hey?' She begun to tell him what she'd done with it, but he jest went a-trompin' away to the barn, an' her a-runnin' after him a-cryin' an' a-tryin' to tell him oh-John-this-an'-that what she'd done with it — an' him jest a-trompin' on with his head set an' that little strip o' whisker on his mule chin a-standin' out straight, as if he didn't hear!"

The door opened suddenly and Mr. Bunnels

entered. He carried two pots of blossoming geraniums. "Here's some posies," he said, with his eyes glued to the floor. "You can cut 'em off to — er — decorate."

The two women went forward with guilty faces and took the pots. "Do you mean we sh'u'd cut 'em *all* off?" asked Mrs. Grimm, mournfully, Mrs. Torrance being for once speechless.

"Yes, cut 'em all off. They ain't none too many for mother. They ain't a thing too many or too nice for mother. I tell you they ain't many sech women as mother was. Cut 'em all off. She deserves ev'ry one of 'em — besides, they're gettin' faded an' ain't much good now, anyhow."

"Well, it's a wonder he stirred hisself enough to bring in a flower," said Mrs. Torrance, suddenly finding her tongue when the door had closed behind Mr. Bunnels. "Sakes! I was so afraid he'd heard us, but I guess not. I wonder if he'd have a stroke if we'd ask him to buy a little ribbon to tie 'em with!"

"He'd have two. She looks reel nice, now, don't she, in spite o' that old faded dress?"

"Yes, she does so. Now, I'm going to stay here an' see that nothing's changed. You go an' eat your dinner, Mis' Grimm, an' then come an' stay here while I eat. I want to see Mis'

Bailey's face when she sees what we've done. I reckon after this she'll know her place."

Mr. and Mrs. Torrance and Belle Squiers rode home from the funeral in the spring-wagon. The curtains had been washed and the wheels greased. The four gray-blanketed seats had been occupied by wagonless neighbors who had all been dropped at their respective homes. Mrs. Torrance sat with her husband. Immediately behind, on the edge of the seat, erect and solemn-eyed like a youthful spectre, sat Belle Squiers.

"Well, ma," said Mr. Torrance at last, "ev'rything went off nice. Did you oversee things?" He looked straight ahead. He held the lines loosely and kept them undulating along the horses' backs.

Mrs. Torrance lowered her head and swelled out her neck in front until, thin as she was, she could have boasted quite a respectable double-chin.

"Yes," she said, "I did."

"Say, ma," piped out Belle Squiers, "did Mis' Bailey git there ahead o' you?"

"Yes, she did. Belle Squiers, she up an' laid Mis' Bunnels all out, jest as I said she would!"

"Hunh!" said Mr. Torrance. He looked

straight down the road which ran through an emerald wood and lost itself in the flushed gold of the sunset.

"Yes, she did. But *I* showed her! I done it all over ag'in, to suit my own taste."

A look of admiration glowed upon her husband's face. Still, he kept his eyes fixed down the road. He never permitted his "women folks" to perceive that he was proud of them. The smallest inclination to express approval of any act of theirs was firmly repressed.

"An' then I set there an' *set* there, an' see that nobody meddled," continued Mrs. Torrance. "I'd of set there tell the Fourth o' July but I'd of had things my own way. Mis' Bailey didn't git a chance to change so much as a scrap o' lace."

"I want to know — hunh!" said Mr. Torrance. "Git up, Dick," he added, with sudden energy. "Here's the barn-gate a-standing wide open an' you too durn lazy to trot in! Klk, klk, klk! Ma, I see that brindle heifer's got into the orchud. You send an' drive her out, will you? She's right behind the dry-house — clost to the Norther' Spy tree."

It was late before the work was done that night. After the others had gone to bed Mrs.

Torrance "set" the bread, beating the thin batter long and hard with her large hand. She held her head to one side and breathed heavily.

She covered the bread with a spotless cloth and placed it near the stove. Then she went out to the pump to wash her hands. As she stood drying them on the long towel she observed that it was an unusually beautiful night. She walked almost unconsciously out to the bars.

It was the blossom time of the year. There was a sensuous perfume on the air — the married breaths of all blowing things. The path was bordered with white and lavender lilacs. There were little drifts of sweet alyssum and mignonette. A wistaria hung its full lavender clusters over the porch. A large bed had been given entirely to clove pinks.

A full moon moved slowly up the sky. Long ago it had shaken itself free of the tree-tops on the mountain. The sky was a deep blue, untroubled by a cloud; but all the stars were burning in its deeps. Dews sparkled in linked chains on flowers and leaves. There was a marsh not far away, and the frogs were murmuring drowsily, as if asleep.

Mrs. Torrance leaned one elbow on the bars and rested her cheek on the back of her closed hand; the thin layer of flesh pushed up in

wrinkles under her temples. With the other hand she held her skirts up high out of the dews. A sudden soft wind gathered up all the garden's perfume and shook it loose about her.

"My!" she said. "Ain't that sweet, though!" Her thin nostrils expanded. "How them frogs keep a-hollering — day an' night! They must holler 'n their sleep — a-dreaming, mebbe. Geese-heads!"

She stood for a long time motionless. Once or twice she sighed deeply. The poetry of the night was drawing her irresistibly.

"I guess poor Mis' Bunnels is a-taking a good rest," she said, softly. "She ain't a-worrying about his old dollars to-night. My, how nice everything smells! I never see sech a night. I feel as if I could *fly* — clear off some'ers where they ain't any cows to milk an' ca'ves to wean. Jest flowers to lay down in an' smell of, an' little cricks to hear go a-babbling by. My!"

There was another silence — a long one. Her poor starved soul went off on a beautiful journey about which she would never dare to tell her nearest or her dearest.

Suddenly, somewhere, a calf lifted its voice in a loud, rasping bawl. She gave a guilty start and turned back to the house. "I'll have to wean that heifer to-morrow — sure," she said, with a sigh. "There! I hev to laff when I

think o' poor Mis' Bailey. I guess she'll wait till she's sent fer after this! I'm reel glad that I up an' outed her. Pa is, too, only he's too big a stubborn-head to confess-up to it. Well, there! I can afford to let her hev the pattern o' that log-cabin quilt now."

A PASSION-FLOWER OF THE WEST

"Drusilla! Dru-sil-la!"

"Ye-es'm."

"Why, it's past four o'clock a'ready. I over-slep' myself."

To this came no reply.

"Drusilla! Are yuh awake? Answer up. Yuh wanted I sh'u'd call yuh early, so's yuh c'u'd pick hops an' not git all het up so. Sleepy-head! Wake yourself up or I'll stand here an' holler tell noon."

The girl turned her head slowly on the calico-covered pillow; her eyes opened sleepily upon her mother; a faint smile curled her lips. She saw the white tent arched above her. Then the soft lids sunk languidly again.

"Dru-silla! You'd aggravate St. John hisself! You'd —"

Mrs. Peacock hesitated, overtaken suddenly by a fear that she might possibly have named a more patient saint than John.

"Oh, ma, I'm awake."

"Well, open up your eyes then, so's I'll know it. You'll have to hurry up if yuh pick many

hops while they're heavy. I bet a picayune that she-ca'f of a Grandy's out a-pickin' a'ready. Not as she'll pick very many, though, if Elmer McGoon's a-pickin' within reach o' that long tongue o' her 'n," she added with a diplomacy that was laudable at so early an hour.

Drusilla opened her eyes suddenly. She was wide-awake now.

"You go back to bed, ma, an' I'll get right up." She broke out laughing merrily. "I wish you c'u'd see yourself. You look so."

Mrs. Peacock turned huffy in a twinkling.

"Well, how d' I look, she-ca'f? What ails me? Aigh?"

"Oh — that calico thing you've got on you," said Drusilla, still laughing. "An' that little rag of hair bobbin' down your back; an' that — "

"Well, yuh you can hold your tongue if that's all you've got to do. A-makin' fun o' your mother! I'd be ashamed o' myself. After my a-gettin' up at this hour to call yuh."

She stepped gingerly across the tent and got into her "bunk," turning her broad back, with a great air of wounded love, to her irreverent offspring.

It was just five o'clock when Drusilla went singing down through the beautiful hop-field. The tall vines arched and met above her. It was like walking through a long, emerald tunnel.

The hops hung in pale green clusters along the broad, darker green leaves. A soft, continuous music — as of low winds among the tasselled corn — went with her as she walked.

In half an hour the sun would come struggling up the rugged side of Mount Rainier. Pale primrose and salmon clouds were already mounting lazily the pearl-colored sky to herald his proud coming. The white mist of late summer, blown in from Puget Sound, swam from the depths of the green valley to the snow mountains. A meadow-lark's pure notes uprose from the open spaces; and from the fringe of trees far down the valley, where the White River went winding through, came back the clear, joyous replies.

Drusilla set her basket on the ground. It was all soft twilight where she stood. The stars still shone palely above her. Some one came whistling down behind her. She did not look. She pretended that she did not hear. But the color came throbbing to her cheeks, — that rare, ravishing color that goes with red-gold hair.

"Hold on, Drusilla," called a gay voice. "I'll take that pole down for you."

She looked toward him with a start that was very well done, indeed.

"Oh — you?" she said.

"Of course, — me. Who else 'u'd get up at daylight just to have an hour's pickin' alongside o' Drusilla Peacock?"

She threw her hand out with a coquettish movement.

"Go on! You did it to pick while the hops are heavy."

He caught her hand and held it.

"Drusilla, you know that ain't so. Say, you've got the prettiest hand on the whole hop-ranch. It's all scratched up though, now, with the vines."

"How d' you know it's the prettiest?" demanded the girl, shrewdly. "Have you been goin' around holdin' all of 'em?"

Many a more polished gentleman has been disconcerted by a similar question. Elmer McGoon reddened.

"Oh, pshaw! You take a fellow up so! Drusilla, what makes you take a fellow up so? I'm goin' to make you pay for bein' so sassy." He attempted to draw her to him; but she restrained him with the stern, level look which, in a woman's eyes, is stronger than any weapon. "Don't," she said, quietly.

"Don't? Why not? I *want* to kiss you. Drusilla, you're the only girl on earth that always hollers 'don't.'"

"Am I?" she said, coldly.

He colored again.

"There you go — takin' me up again. I can't say anything. Drusilla, I love you!"

The girl looked at him, smiling; but her eyes were sad.

"Do you?" she said, gently.

"Yes, I do; but you never believe a word I say."

"Well, take down the pole an' we'll go to pickin'. I want to stop early to-night, so 's to have time to get ready for the dance."

"Oh, yes. You're goin' to dance every waltz with me, an' the mazooka."

"Am I?"

"Yes, you *am*. Here's your pole. Ain't this great? Just look out the end of the rows an' see the sky there 'n the East! Pretty near sun-up."

The girl looked wistfully.

The sky was a pale green now. Across it reached long, trembling rays of crimson and violet. The frozen chain of Olympics was melting in a golden fire. The white mist on the valley was shaken through with rose. There was a marvellous halo on the lofty brow of Rainier. Far off the larks were still lifting their notes of praise, but under those tall vines there was deep silence, save for the low, rippling murmur of the leaves, one against the other.

"Ain't this jolly, though!" spoke up the young man, cheerfully.

But the girl put out her hand.

"Oh, hush!" she breathed softly through parted lips.

"It is too beautiful to talk about. It's like what they put on the brow of Christ in the pictures."

The young man laughed in an embarrassed way.

"Oh, say, now, Drusilla."

"It is. Oh, Elmer," — she turned her deep, asking eyes upon him; her voice was but a whisper — "do you s'pose God puts it there?"

"'God'?" repeated Elmer, stupidly. "Drusilla, have you gone clean daft? Say! *Puts — what — where?*"

"W'y, — all them little streaks of gold running up from the top of Mount Rainier. It's like what they paint on the brow of Christ. I forget what they call it."

"They call it a hello," said the young man with a great air. "It's wicked to talk about sech things, Drusilla."

"I don't b'lieve it's wicked." She spoke simply. "You don't understand, Elmer." Tears flashed suddenly into her eyes. She moved to him and leaned her beautiful young body sweetly upon him. "Oh, Elmer," she said, very sadly,

"you say you love me, an' I know I love you; but can't you see how far apart we are? When we are alone you always want to be kissin' me to show your love; an' *I*—"

"Well, —an' you?"

"I want to be oh! so still, an' not talk or touch you; just to set close to you, — an' then," — she spoke diffidently now, with lowered eyes, the tears still on her lashes, — "if it's late at night or early, like this, in the mornin', an' very still, I'm so happy that it's like pain; an' I have the queerest feelin', Elmer, that I can — can —"

"Can what?"

"Can — hear God breathe."

There was a long silence. Then —

"'Hear — God — breathe'!" repeated Elmer, in a stupefied way. He drew a long breath, helplessly. His brown face was a study. But he was a good swimmer. He always came up out of the deepest waters like a cork. After a moment he commenced patting her on the back with a most beautiful indulgence, considering.

"Well, I reckon we'd best get to pickin' hops, Drusilla," he said, cheerfully. "It's nice an' coolish, an' they weigh heavier with the doos on 'em. I see yesterday that the siwashes picked more 'n the whites."

"That so?" said Drusilla, coldly. She drew

herself from him with a hurt look and began picking the soft green clusters and dropping them into the large box he had placed between her pole and the one he had pulled down for himself. Somewhere a gay voice — a woman's voice — called :

"Hop-pole ! Hop-pole ! Ha-ah-op-pole !"

It was answered by shouts and calls and laughter from all parts of the field. The pickers were swarming down to work, — young and old, women and men, white people, Indians and half-breeds. The sun lay throbbing on the crest of Mount Rainier, and all the mists were fleeing away, like frightened sheep, to the sea.

"Well, you may shoot me dead," exclaimed her mother's voice, suddenly, behind them, loud and rasping, "if you've picked enough hops to hide a flea in ! After my a-gittin' up at four o'clock, an' a-callin' yuh to pick so's yuh w'u'dn't git het up so, — an' while the hops is heavy, — an' a-layin' awake all this time because I c'u'dn't git to sleep ag'in, here yuh ain't got enough hops to smell of ! Yuh may shoot me dead !"

At eight o'clock that evening the big barn was lighted up for the dance. The hop ranch was one of the largest in the State. The owner was wealthy and generous. It was his pleasure to provide for the comfort and enjoyment of those who for a few weeks each year peopled

his fields. There were clean "shacks" for those who did not prefer tents to live in. There were bath-houses down on the river; and the floor of the barn had been laid of smooth, narrow boards, for dancing on Saturday nights. It was intimated, however, by his neighbors, that he was as "long-headed" as he was benevolent. The best and swiftest pickers came each year to his fields. Hop-picking is considered a great "lark" in the State of Washington. Young folks, weary of the monotony and loneliness of farm life, go eagerly to the hop-fields — not so much for the couple of dollars which each will earn daily, as for change and companionship, for the break in the dull round of their lives, the making of new acquaintances, the pleasures of the nights that follow the days of toil. The weekly dances are great events. There are hopes and ambitions, and, alas! passions, in these beautiful hop-fields, as in higher places.

Drusilla walked through the soft dusk to the barn with Elmer McGoon. He had put his arm through hers, country-fashion, and folded his warm, thick fingers about her slim wrist. His face was freshly shaven and red; he was breathing rather excitedly; the outreaching music of the violins had put a sudden spring into his usually heavy carriage; he held his head high and tramped along in the narrow path, while

Drusilla stumbled contentedly over clods and stones and tangles of grass at his side.

"Don't go quite so fast, Elmer," she said, at last. "I keep a-stumblin' so."

"Whatchasay?"

"W'y, — I say, don't go quite so fast; I keep a-stumblin'."

"Oh!" He walked more slowly, but still with a high head and a determined chin. "If you'd watch your path instid of gazin' at the stars so all the time, 'Silla, you wouldn't stumble so."

"There don't seem to be much path, does there?"

"W'y, yes, there is so; there's a reel good one."

"Well, let's walk slow, — reel slow; it's awful nice out here." The poetry of the night was beginning to steal upon the girl's senses. She drew in her breath noiselessly "Elmer, don't you think the wind in the hop-vines sounds just like beautiful music?"

"I don't know 's I think so."

"Well, listen. You hear it now, Elmer?"

"Huckleberries! Drusilla, you do beat all! Them's the fiddles."

"Oh, I don't mean the fiddles. There's another music besides them."

"Well, *I* don't hear it. Let's go on. They'll be havin' the march before we get there if we fool much longer."

"I believe this is nicer than dancin', Elmer, — bein' out here all alone."

"Is it?" The gentleman's voice held a note of doubt.

Drusilla stopped abruptly. "Oh, look — look quick, Elmer!"

"Look — where? What's the matter of you *now?*"

Usually, only a married man, or a man who has endured a long betrothal, puts that emphasis on the word "now" in such a sentence. It means a great deal.

"It was a star fallin' — "

"A star fallin'! I thought choo see a spook. Didn't choo ever see a star fall before?"

"Ye-es, — but they're always beautiful to see. Don't you think so?"

"I don't know 's I think so."

"Well," said the girl, very softly, "I believe stars are the souls of people, — I mean women; an' every one comes out an' watches tell it sees somebody it loved down on earth die, — some man; and when he is doomed to hell it loves him so it gives up heaven an' falls to him — "

"I don't see what makes you think all the men go to hell!" said Mr. McGoon, huffily. "I reckon some women get there, too."

Drusilla's thought leaped, like a flame of red lightning, to Hannah Grandy, — the only woman

she had ever been able to picture in her imagination as an occupant of that undesirable place. After a moment she said, with a sigh, "Well, anyhow, it's just the time for fallin' stars now."

"It's just the time for dog-days," said Mr. McGoon, distinctly.

He marched up the steps of the barn, pulling his companion along beside him with a determined air. He had decided that it was time to be at the dance; if Drusilla Peacock wanted to go with him she'd have to keep up with him; if she didn't want to she could stay behind. When a woman got it into her head that all the women went to heaven and all the men to some other place it was about time for a man to stop humorin' her and put his foot down!

Mr. McGoon's foot was large and heavy.

The barn was lighted with coal-oil lamps, set on wooden brackets, with reflectors behind them. Their odor, blent with that of perspiration, was anything but pleasant. The floor was strewn with fine shavings from wax candles. The two violinists sat on large drygoods boxes at one end of the room. They sat with their legs crossed and their heads turned to one side; their eyes were half closed. They were "tuning up."

Still gripping Drusilla's wrist, the young man led her into the march, which was just forming.

Her mother smiled proudly upon her from amongst a dozen other mothers sitting in one corner. One could guess, from a look at the faces of the mothers, whose daughters were provided with partners, and whose were not.

"Look-ee!" said Mrs. Peacock, nudging her neighbor with a large elbow. "Here's Drusilla."

"Where at?"

"W'y, right here — here. She's with Elmer McGoon."

"Oh," said Mrs. Fleming.

"Where's your Henrietta at, Mis' Flemin'? I don't see her on the floor anywheres."

"I don't know," said Mrs. Fleming, frigidly.

Mrs. Peacock stood up and searched the room.

"W'y, she ain't on the floor," she said, sitting down with a troubled look. "Ain't that too bad! How do yuh s'pose that happened? There seems to be plenty o' young men. Even that Riley girl's got a pardner — an' she can't dance for shucks."

"Henrietta wa'n't feelin' overly well," said Mrs. Fleming, keeping her chin up.

"She'll feel better if she gits to dancin'. Oh, there she sets over there all alone. We'll have to ask somebody to dance with 'er."

"She can git a plenty pardners without askin'."

"How?"

"I say she can git a plenty pardners without askin'."

"Oh, can she? All right, then. There's that she-ca'f of a Grandy! If she ain't got on a white *tarl'tan* — at a dance in a barn! An' a low neck an' short sleeves — "

"Well, she can wear a low neck an' short sleeves; she ain't thin, like Drusilla. She's got a beautiful neck an' arms. I see Elmer McGoon keeps a-lookin' at 'er mighty close. I did hear — "

Mrs. Peacock turned a stern gaze upon her.

"What did yuh hear?"

"Oh, nothin' much. Well, then, I hear that he hangs round 'er a good deal. They take walks sometimes along latish in the evenin'."

Mrs. Peacock fanned violently with a palm-leaf; her face was scarlet.

"I always admire to see the grand march," she said. "Drusilla goes through it so graceful. I didn't ketch what choo said about the Grandy girl, but it ain't no matter. I'd be ashamed to wear my dress that way. Modest girls don't do it."

"Not if they're thin!" cried Mrs. Fleming, with a little shrill laugh.

The grand march ended in a plain quadrille. At its conclusion Drusilla was led, flushed and fanning, to a seat beside her mother. Her partner, after a swift glance around the room, with-

drew to one corner, where several young men stood, industriously wiping their necks with their handkerchiefs. The night was warm.

The next dance was a schottische; then came another quadrille. The schottische had been a torment to Drusilla. She had had a poor partner, but she could have borne that cheerfully if only Elmer had not chosen Hannah Grandy. She could not endure the sight of that bare arm on his shoulder and that warm, crimson cheek so close to his lips. And what a red fire was in the girl's black eyes when she lifted the languid lids with their fringe of black lashes! Surely, surely, there was a new fire in the man's eyes, too, as he looked down on the beautiful girl-woman swinging so yieldingly in his arms. The lowliest community has its Delilah.

Drusilla's feet lost their lightness.

The quadrille was better; Elmer was not even in the same set with Hannah Grandy. Then a large card with "Waltz" written on it was hung up. Drusilla's heart commenced to beat again. All the waltzes were hers. But the master of ceremonies suddenly climbed upon a box and shouted, "Ladies take their choice!"

There was the usual titter among the girls; the young men fell back, smiling, sheepish, and stood awkwardly waiting to be chosen. Then there was a flutter and a scramble.

Drusilla arose and made her way modestly across the room. When within three steps of Elmer, Hannah Grandy flashed past her and slipped her bare, bangled arm through his and drew him away. He looked down into her eyes as he went, and Drusilla, herself unseen, saw the look.

She stood still. The color ebbed out of her face, the smile left her lips; the lights and the people went swimming dizzily around her. She walked slowly back to her mother. She was very pale. There was a wide, strained look in her eyes.

"Got left, did yuh?" said Mrs. Fleming, cheerfully.

"Yes'm," said Drusilla.

"Well, why don't choo *kyak*, as the siwashes say, an' choose somebody else?"

"There ain't anybody else I'd choose," said the girl, simply.

"I w'u'dn't be such a heifer!" whispered her mother, fiercely. "I'd go an' get somebody else."

"I don't want anybody else."

"Well, what if yuh don't? Ac' as if yuh do, anyhow. Don't ever let a man see yuh don't want anybody but him, gump."

"Why not? I believe in lettin' people see the truth."

"Oh — *gump!*"

"You don't want me to act a lie, do you?"

"Talk low. That Mis' Flemin' 'll hear yuh next. I don't care whuther you ac' a lie, or not. If yuh want to keep a man in love with yuh, yuh have to ac' as if you didn't care too much about him. He'll git tired of yuh soon as he sees he's got choo."

"I don't believe it." The girl's voice was fierce with pain. "Not if he's the right kind of man — an' if he ain't, the sooner I find it out, the better."

"Mule!"

"Well, you needn't to tell me that if a man loves a woman he'll think any less of her because she don't act flirty, but lets him see she loves him an' never *thinks* of anybody else."

"Who told yuh that?"

"Nobody told me. I *feel* it. I've told him now that I love him, so I'm not goin' to pretend to anybody I don't."

"Yuh ain't got a bit o' spunk! If yuh've gone an' told him that, before he's reg'lar asked yuh to marry him, yuh'll never git him — never — an' that's all there is about it." Mrs. Peacock's tone was full of bitterness.

"Well, I'd rather never get him than to have to be dishonest an' act a lie," said the girl, proudly. There was a ring in her voice and a

flash in her glance as it rested upon her mother.

"— had spring chicken for dinner, *fried*," said a woman's voice behind them, exultingly. "It was tender as tender. An' pickle-beets, an' roastin'-ears, an' peaches-an'-cream. I tell you."

"Oh, hush! — klk, klk, klk!" cried another woman, clapping her large hands together in a very ecstasy of envy. "It makes my mouth water to think o' sech a dinner in a hop-field! What on earth did you fry it on?"

When the next waltz was called, Elmer came and stood before Drusilla. He expected that she would rise with her usual joyousness. She lifted her eyes and gave him a gentle, steady look. His eyelids fluttered.

When a man's eyelids flutter, he has been doing something wrong.

"This is our waltz," he said, reddening a little.

"Yes," said the girl, simply; "but I didn't know 's you'd come for me, so I promised to dance it with Curley Winston."

Mrs. Peacock's heart swelled with triumph. Had Drusilla got her spunk up?

The young man's face was scarlet now. "Well, yuh promised it to me first."

"Yes," she said, distinctly; "but I didn't know 's you'd come for me."

He stood a moment, silent; then he said, sullenly, "Well, come an' have some lemonade, an' we'll see about this."

She arose at once and went with him.

"Yuh can tell him yuh promised me first," he said, holding his chin up and lifting his feet high as he walked.

"I wouldn't like to do that; he never served me that way."

"Well, I ast choo for this waltz at five o'clock this mornin'."

"You ast me for *all* the waltzes, Elmer."

"I — that so?"

"Yes, that's so. I went to get you for the ladies' choice, an' you walked right off with Hannah Grandy."

"Well — I didn't reckon a — a ladies' choice counted."

He handed her a glass of lemonade. She held it and looked at him with kind, but stern, eyes. "Why not?"

"Oh, I don't know jest why not," he said, helplessly. "She come along an' ast me, an' I — went."

"Oh! Then if she come along an' ast you for this 'n, I s'pose you'd go, too."

He was silent.

"Are you goin' to dance any more waltzes with her, Elmer?"

"Well, I — did ask her for one or two more," he faltered, miserably. "She jest as good as ast me to ask her, — so I hatto. Here comes that galoot of a Winston. Now, yuh tell him yuh promised this dance to me."

But, still with that look of gentle patience on her face, the girl walked away with the other man. Elmer stood by the door and watched them. There was a black frown on his brow.

A quadrille followed the waltz. He had engaged a young woman for the dance; and when he had reluctantly led her out on the floor and turned an uneasy glance around the room, he found, to his consternation, that Drusilla and her mother were quietly taking their departure from the barn.

Drusilla walked along silently beside her mother in the sweet darkness. "Yuh keep your spunk up," said that lady in a stern whisper, "an' yuh're all right."

Drusilla was silent.

"Don't keep it up too high, though," added Mrs. Peacock, after a moment's reflection. "Yuh hear?"

"Yes'm."

"Well, why don't choo answer?"

"I didn't have anything to say 's the reason."

"He's dead in love with yuh; a body can see that with ha'f a' eye. But that don't hender a man's a-flirtin', if some other girl flings herself right at him."

"I guess it henders the right kind of a man."

"Oh, yuh talk so! There ain't any right kind o' men."

Drusilla drew a long breath that was not quite a sigh.

"Well," she said, in a tone that her mother knew and dreaded, "I'll never get married. I've made up my mind."

"Loon!" cried her mother, furiously. "Yuh ain't got a speck o' sense! Where'd yuh git your idiotic at, I'd like to know! Not from me! Yuh'd go an' let a man like Elmer McGoon off the hook jest because he danced with some other girl! I reckon yuh expect to keep him tied to your apron-string the rest o' his natural life."

"It wasn't the dancin'," said Drusilla, clearly. "It was the — principle. He knew it wasn't right to dance with her when he'd ast me; but he jest felt like doin' it, so he did, right or wrong, an' thought I'd overlook it."

"Any girl w'u'd, if she had any sense."

"I guess I ain't got any, then," said Drusilla, quietly, pausing for her mother to enter the tent. "If a man won't take the trouble to keep his word an' not hurt the feelin's of the girl he pre-

tends to love, before he marries, he won't afterwards."

"Yuh fool, you!" cried her mother, groping into the dark tent.

The girl stood for a moment listening to the low wind rippling the hop-leaves. Then the barn doors were opened and the wail of the violins rose and fell. Tears came, stinging, to her eyes. She went into the tent at once, bending through the opening, over which she closed and buttoned the canvas with shaking fingers.

The following day being Sunday, few in the hop-field breakfasted before noon. Drusilla remained in the tent all day. Her mother went around visiting among the other tents and shacks in the afternoon. In the evening she went to the services in the little white school-house down by the river.

Just as the sun was setting Drusilla heard a step outside the tent. It shambled about in front of the door for a minute or more; then Mr. McGoon's voice said, "Drusilla!"

She arose at once and opened the canvas door. She was very pale, but the look she gave him was clear and steady. She wore a light green linen dress. A plume of rose-colored fireweed

was tucked into her girdle. She had never looked prettier.

"Well, Elmer," she said, kindly, "you come in?"

He twisted awkwardly. His eyes fastened hungrily, from under their fluttering lids, upon her beauty.

"Don't choo want to take a walk down through the pasture to the river?"

She hesitated. "I'd just as soon," she said, then.

His face brightened.

She came out and walked lightly along beside him, bareheaded. The sunset falling upon her put color into her cheeks and turned her gold hair to a deep, beautiful red. The soft wind blew short locks across her brow and temples.

Cattle and sheep were lying and standing under the trees. The fireweed lifted its rosy plumes everywhere. There were great billows of the everlasting's greenish snow; the golden-rod put up its lovely spikes among the ferns, and there was many a gay company of lavender asters. The banks of the creeks were blue with brooklime — that daintiest of forget-me-nots.

The girl saw all the beauty of earth and sky, but for once it gave her no pleasure. It seemed to her, as they walked along together silently,

that every flower bending toward her whispered: "It is the last, last time!"

They came finally to the river and sat down on the bank under a maple-tree. They had sat there before, — was it only three days ago? thought the girl. It seemed like months.

The river moved slowly before them, bearing the sunset's deep crimson upon its breast. There was a low marsh near by, wherein grew tall velvet tules, from whose cool depth came the dreamy murmur of the frogs.

"Drusilla," said the young man. He looked at her with miserable eyes. He stretched out a big warm hand and laid it on hers.

She trembled strongly; then she lifted her level look to his eyes.

"Yes, Elmer?"

"Ain't choo a-goin' to forgive me for — oh, for last night, you know?"

"Oh, yes; I've already forgiven you."

"That's a brick!" He moved closer to her. "D' yuh know, I felt all broke up when yuh left the barn last night?"

"Did you?" said the girl. Her voice shook. This was her life-tragedy; and his tone betrayed unconsciously that to him it was only a comedy with a serious vein running through it.

"Yes, I did. Drusilla" — his chin went up — "I'm ready to marry yuh any day yuh set."

"Oh," she cried, with a quick sob, a dry sob; "I can't marry you, Elmer — never. Don't think about it. It's — it's all over."

"Can't — marry — me!" He stared at her. "Can't — marry — *me!* Why, what on earth's got into yuh, now? What's all over?"

"Our — our goin' together. You can go an' marry — Hannah Grandy."

"Oh, Lord!" said Mr. McGoon. "Yuh're jealous!" She shrank, as if from a rude blow. "Now see here, Drusilla; I don't want to marry Hannah Grandy. I give yuh my word, I wouldn't marry her if she was the only girl on Puget Sound."

"Why?"

"Oh, I don't know jest why. She — well, she ain't the kind of girl a fellow wants to marry, yuh know. She — oh, she's jest the kind of a girl to dance with — er."

"Oh," said Drusilla, putting back a lock of hair with a steady hand, "you want to marry *me* an' waltz with *her!* Is that it?"

"Oh — huckleberries!" said Mr. McGoon, elegantly. "I never see your beat to pin a fellow down! It ought to be enough for yuh to know I want to marry yuh an' not her."

The sunset had drawn all its beautiful colors away from the valley and mountains, and borne them to some other where across the sea. Pearl

and lavender clouds were piled in the west. Venus had lit her splendid lamp, and the gold rim of the harvest moon was trembling like a thin sickle on the brow of the hill.

"It's not enough," said Drusilla. "I love you, Elmer, but I can't marry you. I love you so I never could have a thought or a pleasure that didn't have you in the centre. When a girl loves like that, she oughtn't to marry anybody that doesn't love her just the same."

"Well, if I didn't love yuh, I wouldn't ask yuh to marry me."

She turned a full, slow look upon him. The exaltation of her thought shone from her eyes and lifted even him a little out of his animalism.

"Love! You don't know what love is!" She breathed, rather than uttered, the words. "You want to marry me. You would make what the world calls a good husband; you would give me a good home an' a hired girl — perhaps, even, a set of hair-cloth furniture." A miserable smile moved her lips. "You would set me down in such a home an' expect me to never have a wish outside of it. If I told you I wanted less comfort an' more *love*, you'd pat me on the back an' say you never saw my beat, — there was no such thing as pleasin' me. But oh!" she cried out passionately, "*I love you!* I'd go mad tryin' to

make your love match mine. My love is one great prayer to God, day an' night." Her voice quivered and broke. She threw her head down on her knees and burst into wild sobbing.

When her passion had spent itself, she lifted her head and looked at him with sweet, but very sorrowful, eyes. "Oh, my dearest," she said, "we should be so wretched together. Go an' marry some girl that'll be satisfied with a home an' the kind of love that most men have to give; an' be glad always that I had strength to prove my great love for you by not marryin' you. You will be happy, an' I"— she hesitated. "You mustn't pity me. My love is a fire that'll keep me warm. An' then I have God," she uttered, very softly. "I'm not religious an' I'm not churchy, you know; but I have God more than most people. I see Him in every sunset an' in every tree an' every flower. It is the God in my love that makes it so beautiful."

Mr. McGoon arose slowly, as if in a state of stupefaction. He pulled his long figure up and lifted his chin high.

"Well, all is," he said, distinctly, "I think yuh're 'n idjit, or else yuh've been a-readin' yellow-back novels. If yuh think I'll keep on a-coaxin' yuh to marry me, yuh'll git fooled,— that's all."

He turned his broad back on her and strode

away, without another word, along the path to the hop-field.

Drusilla looked after him with sorrowful eyes. She did not know that it was the ideal, not the man, that she loved with such exalted passion. There was no one to tell her; and she had no books. Her wisdom was as the fragrance of a flower.

"He'll marry somebody else," she said, her eyes still dwelling upon him, "an' have a fine farm an' horses an' cattle. He may be a senator an' take his wife to Olympia in the winter. He'll give her at least three dresses a year, an' a top-buggy, — that always needs oilin', — an' a set of hair-cloth furniture. He may even get her an org'n with a high back an' brackets; but he'll never, never, never let her stay out till midnight to hear the wind in the trees or the tide comin' up the beach. . . . And I — "

Her eyes turned upward to the red lamps of heaven.

THE ARNSPIKER CHICKENS

THE ARNSPIKER CHICKENS

"Well, if there ain't them Arnspiker chickens in the strawberry patch *ag'in!* Oh-*oh!* that's the fifth time this mornin', an' I've druv 'em out with stove-wood every time. It don't do a bit o' good. They just git into a nice hill an' go to wallerin' an' scratchin' an' cluckin'! The cluckin' makes me almost as aggravated as the scratchin'—it sounds just as if they was *darin'* me, because they know I durs'n't kill 'em. Oh, just look at 'em! A-flound'rin' right in the middle of that nicest hill! It's enough to distract a saint! Father! Father! For pity's sake—can't you go an' scare 'em out with stove-wood?"

Mr. Webster got up stiffly from the dinner-table. He was a patient-faced old gentleman with blue, dreamy eyes. He had a stoop in his shoulders—from overmuch hoeing in great potato fields, he always explained with his gentle smile; but some of his neighbors were wont to declare among themselves that "livin' all them years with Mis' Webster's tongue was enough to give him a stoop in his shoulders without ever tetchin' a hoe."

"Why, mother," he said, going hesitatingly to the kitchen door, "I don't like to throw stove-wood at 'em. I might hurt 'em."

"You might *hurt* 'em, aigh? Well, I want that you should *hurt* 'em. I want that you should *kill* 'em if they don't stay out o' that strawberry patch! What was the sense in our movin' into town to spend the rest o' our days if we're to have the life clucked an' scratched out o' us by our neighbor's chickens? You ain't got any answer to that, have you? Aigh?"

Evidently Mr. Webster had not. He took two or three sticks of wood from the well-filled box, and started again, in a half-hearted way, for the door.

"Oh, my land!" exclaimed Mrs. Webster, contemptuously. She ran after him and snatched the wood from him. "Why don't you wait a coon's age? Why don't you wait till they scratch the strawberries up by the *roots?* I never see! I notice you like to eat the berries as well as anybody, but you ain't willin' to turn your hand over to take care of 'em."

She rushed down the steps and out into the yard, throwing the sticks of wood with fierce strength.

Mr. Webster watched her with anxiety. "Oh, mother, look out!" he called deprecatingly. "You 'most hit that little pullet."

"I *want* to hit that little pullet!"

The chickens flew, cackling, over the low fence and down the hill.

Mrs. Webster stood watching them in grim satisfaction. When they had disappeared among the ferns she came back slowly. Her face was flushed with triumph. She was breathing hard. "I'll pullet 'em!" she said.

"You hadn't ought to throw at 'em, mother." Mr. Webster spoke gently. "You might hurt one of 'em. There's Mis' Arnspiker a-standin' in the door, a-watchin' you, too."

"Well, I'm glad she saw me. Where's my sunbunnit at? I'm goin' right down to give her a talkin' to. I've tell her three times now that her chickens is the ruination of my strawberries. All she ever says is, well, she's offul sorry, an' she thinks it's that old speckled hen's fault, an' she'll drive 'em down towards Burmeister's! I wonder if she thinks the Burmeister's want 'em any worse 'n I do! She's got to git red of them chickens, an' that's all there is about it. There's a law ag'in havin' 'em in town an' I ain't a-goin' to stand it another day. I'll let her know I ain't a Corbett an' a Fitzsimmons to stand up an' be knocked down a dozen times!"

"Now, mother, if you go down there, you'll be sorry —"

"You 'tend to your own effairs, father, will

you? I won't be set upon! There can't *anybody* set upon me — let alone that Mis' Arnspiker!"

Mr. Webster went into the kitchen and sat down. "There's no use in argy'n' with Mari'," he said, with a sigh of resignation.

Mr. and Mrs. Webster had crossed the plains in the sixties and settled on a ranch in what was then the territory of Washington. Here they lived a life of toil and privation — a hard, narrow, joyless life — until the "boom" came along in 1888 and made them wealthy.

Then they moved "to town" and built a comfortable home and settled down to the difficult occupation of finding content and peace.

Unfortunately they built upon a hill. There is something about a hill that attracts the large end of a spy-glass as a red rag attracts a bull. Soon after Mrs. Webster had laboriously and patiently climbed her hill and founded her home upon a beautiful height, the iron came into her soul and rusted there.

It was bad enough, she thought, in all mercy, to learn that her neighbors down below gossiped about her leaving her wash a-switching out on the line, all wet and dripping with rain, three days an' nights at a time; and about her using table-cloths with red borders when she could easy afford white ones; and about the unmended

holes in the knees of poor Mr. Webster's undergarments; and about their only using three towels an' two napkins a week — but for them to figure out that she and her husband did not live harmoniously together, solely because four sheets and four pillow-slips were hung on the line every wash-day, turned her soul sick within her.

At first she bore it meekly. But one morning about ten o'clock while she was stooping over the colored clothes in the wash-tub, who should walk into the kitchen but Mrs. Peters in her afternoon dress and white apron. There was a frill of lace at her throat, and she carried her "crochet."

At sight of Mrs. Webster she stood still and threw up her hands.

"Have you got a preparation?"

"Have I got a — *what?*" said Mrs. Webster, through the steam.

"Have you got a preparation?"

"A — *preparation?*"

"Yaas. A preparation. W'y, a rule. Have you got a rule?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"W'y, a rule to make a washing preparation by. I'll lend you mine. I had my wash all out on the line, an' my kitching an' porches an' steps an' all scrubbed by nine o'clock. I come to spend the day — an' here you ain't near through."

Mrs. Webster cleared her throat. "I've only got one rule," she said, "an' that is to do my visitin' on some day besides wash-day; an' I ain't got any preparation — for visitors *on* wash-day."

And she bent into the steam again and was lost to view. But now, of course, she had an enemy.

A few days later Mrs. Gunn came in to "set a spell." "I come to tell you about his brother-in-law's cousin, his wife," she said. "She's got creepin' paralysis in her arm. Creep — *my!* It'll more likely *run.* He was over to his brother's this morning and his brother says his cousin is all worked up. He wants I should go and make a visit on her to-morrow. I ain't suffering to — she's always been thinking herself so exalted, and so anumated over it. Maybe this'll take her down a peg. She won't go a-silking by quite so big — with creepin' paralysis in her arm! He says he's see the grocery wagon go there as high as three times a day. Has she ever made a call on you?"

"No, ma'am," said Mrs. Webster, politely.

"Well, it wouldn't of hurt her. I guess you don't feel bad. She's perfectly frivulous. I can't abide her, but he says, well, never mind — she's in the fambly. I don't like the way her forehead protrudes back, anyhow. W'y, there goes Mis' Brun down town with a white petti-

coat on in all this rain! Did you ever hear tell? Oh, that makes me think! Mis' Brun told me she see a new cupboard a-coming up the alley, an' she thought it must be a-coming here. May I ask if it was Mis' Fiske's? She's selling out, an' we know where everything went to but the cupboard."

All these things and heavier Mrs. Webster endured; but they gradually embittered her. When Mrs. Arnspiker turned her hens out and they came strutting and clucking up the hill to her strawberry patch, her patience went out the window. The worm turned; and being of the long-suffering sex, it turned with unexpected vigor.

Mrs. Webster went down the narrow path among the ferns. She held her skirts up high on both sides.

The Arnspiker home was a small, unpainted shack. It had a dingy, spiritless look. Mrs. Arnspiker was a widow and she was very poor. She had no children and few friends. She took in washing, and she sold eggs.

She was standing on the back porch when Mrs. Webster opened the gate. She was a small, pale woman. Her face had many deep lines of care. There was a kind of entreaty in her faded eyes as she greeted her visitor. It did not move Mrs. Webster.

"How-d'you-do, Mis' Arnspiker?" she said, hostilely.

"How-r-you, Mis' Webster?" Mrs. Arnspiker's heart was beating fast and hard. "Won't you step in an' set down a spell? Or 'd you ruther set down here 'n the sun? Here's a chair — excuse me! It ain't overly clean." She wiped it carefully with the wrong side of her apron. "You're looking reel well, Mis' Webster," she went on, diplomatically. It is better to be born diplomatic than rich. "I never see you looking better. My! the color 'n that calico *is* becoming to you. Where 'd you git it at?"

"Cam'ellses." Mrs. Webster spoke icily.

"Go on! Well, you don't say! I didn't suppose they had anything so pretty in their store. It's offul becoming. That kind o' buff color alwus *is* becoming to a nice, *clear* complexion. There ain't many complected just like you, Mis' Webster, an' so there ain't many that can wear buff."

There was a silence. Mrs. Webster sat looking fixedly at the hard, cleanly swept dooryard. There was not a blade of grass in it. It had a look of desolation — of utter abandonment to despair. She was thinking that it was not so easy to begin about the chickens as she had imagined it would be. After all, Mis' Arnspiker did have some taste about her. It had been only two

days since that uppish Mis' Lawrence had giggled right in her face and cried out — "W'y, Mis' Webster, the idy! *you* a-wearing *buff!*" Giddy, fool thing!

Then she pulled herself together, and said sternly — "Mis' Arnspiker, I come down —"

"I wonder now," interrupted Mrs. Arnspiker, with a flustered air, "if you'd just as live tell how much it were a yard."

"How much what were a yard?"

"Why, that buff calico you're a-wearing."

Mrs. Webster lifted her eyes and looked hard at her neighbor. Her thin lips unclosed. She spoke slowly and firmly. She was not to be propitiated. "It were seven cents. Mis' Arnspiker, I come down —"

"I wonder 'f you'd mind my having one like it, seein's we're neighbors. It wouldn't be becoming to me, though." Mrs. Arnspiker sighed. "There ain't a woman in town it 'u'd become as it does you. There ain't a one."

There was another silence. A faint, uncontrollable blush of pleasure had arisen to Mrs. Webster's thin cheek. She sat looking up at her big, green house on the hill. Her heart stirred pleasantly. She had never been told before that she had a clear complexion. Indeed, had Mrs. Arnspiker been a Catholic, she would have fasted a full week, in the hope of

absolution for suggesting it now; being a Protestant, she meant to put a good sum in the missionary-box to ease her conscience.

"You can have a dress like it, if you want," said Mrs. Webster.

"You're offul clever. I don't believe I can wear it, though; but you're offul clever. Who is that a-going along the path?" She stretched out her thin neck like a chicken and peered out from under lowered lids. "Oh, it's Mis' Ballot! I feel condemned. I ain't been to see her since her baby died. She took it so hard, too. She's a-going out to the cemetry now with a callo lily. Don't she look mournful all in black! I do feel condemned."

There was quite a softened expression on Mrs. Webster's face and all might have been well; but at that critical moment three hens, having been safely delivered of their daily contributions to Mrs. Arnspiker's store, flew from their nests as one hen and, floundering clumsily over the fence, made straight for Mrs. Webster's strawberry patch on a run, cackling triumphantly, as much as to say — "Do we not deserve a berry?"

Mrs. Webster's face grew black. "Mis' Arnspiker," she said, sternly; and Mrs. Arnspiker drew a long breath and gave up. "Your chickens have been in my strawberry patch ag'in, an' been the ruination of it."

"Oh, my!" said Mrs. Arnspiker, collapsing weakly. Mrs. Webster regarded her steadfastly and pitilessly. "I'm offul sorry."

"Well, I'm sorry, too, Mis' Arnspiker. *I'm* sorry just about ten dollars' worth. Bein' sorry don't seem to keep them chickens —"

"It's that old speckled hen's fault!" exclaimed Mrs. Arnspiker, brightening as if with a sudden inspiration. "She coaxes the other 'ns up there. I'll have to drive 'em down towards —"

"Burmeister's," interrupted Mrs. Webster, dryly. "You've been a-doing that for a month past." She got up slowly. "I reckon you'll have to git red o' them hens, Mis' Arnspiker. I've had just about all of 'em I want. I ain't a Corbett or a Fitzsimmons — to stand up an' be knocked down a dozen times! I can't efford to set out berries for *hens*. How'd you like to have a nice place like our 'n, an' then go an' have everything ruined up by somebody's hens?"

"It seems to me," said Mrs. Arnspiker, with a sigh, "if I had a nice place like your 'n, I'd be so happy I wouldn't worry over little things like strawberries."

She did not mean to be impertinent. It did not occur to her that she was. She simply gave utterance to the thought as it came to her.

Mrs. Webster's face grew scarlet. She had

been yearning for something at which she might take offence. It is not possible to give a piece of one's mind to a meek person. Now, this sounded like a challenge.

"Oh, you wouldn't, aigh? Well, I'll give you to know I've *slaved* for all I got, Mis' Arnspiker!"

"Well, so 've I," said Mrs. Arnspiker, with a simplicity that held unconscious pathos. "But, someways, Mis' Webster, some people slave an' git rich, an' other 'ns slave an' git poor."

This was a truth that had never presented itself to Mrs. Webster. For a full minute she was silent. Then she drew in her thin lips. "Well, this ain't got anything to do with the chickens," she said. "There's a law ag'in 'em, an' I reckon you'll have to either git red of 'em or keep 'em shet up."

"They won't lay if I keep 'em shet up," said Mrs. Arnspiker, helplessly. "I can't keep 'em shet up. I got to have my eggs."

"Well, an' I got to have my strawberries. I got the law. You can't git around that, can you? It ain't many as 'u'd come an' argy with you 's I've done."

There was a deep silence. A brown hen came strutting about Mrs. Arnspiker's feet. She had a pert and flaunting air that betrayed her habit of imposing upon that lady's affection-

ate regard for her. Mrs. Arnspiker looked at her. Her eyes filled suddenly with tears. "I don't believe I *could* part with that little brown hen," she said, brokenly.

"She's the wo'st of the hull of 'em!" exclaimed Mrs. Webster, fiercely. "I've said all I'm a-going to. You can do just as you want, Mis' Arnspiker. But if them hens git into my strawberry patch ag'in an' ruminate around them vines, — you'll have to stand the damage. I got the law!"

She turned abruptly and went out of the yard. She held one shoulder higher than the other, and walked with long, firm strides, swinging her arms.

It was a week later that Mrs. Worstel came to spend the afternoon with Mrs. Webster. She brought a towel which she was hemstitching. The two ladies sat on the back porch, because it was shaded by hop-vines. The cool, salt breeze from off Puget Sound swept through, rustling the harsh hop-leaves and swinging the scarlet clusters of bloom on the wild honeysuckle vine over the window.

It was June. The "yard" was in its fairest beauty. The rose-bushes were bending beneath

their riot of bloom. One bed was a long flame of ruddy gold where the California poppies opened their hearts. Another was bordered with purple and yellow pansies. Some tardy gladioli were thrusting their pale green swords up through the rich earth. Velvet wallflowers still sweetened the air. Bees waded through their pollen, and lavender butterflies drifted down on spread wings to find them. Banks of "summer snow" still made the terraces white.

"My-O, my land!" said Mrs. Worstel, dropping her work in her lap. "How sweet it is!"

"It is so," said Mrs. Webster, pulling herself up with pride. "There ain't many yards furder along than mine, if I do say it. I never see such flowers in Peoria-'llinois."

"Oh, did you come from Peoria-'llinois? W'y, I'm from Quincy-'llinois, myself."

"I want to know."

"Yaas. I stopped in at Mis' Arnspiker's as I come along. She's feelin' turrable bad."

Mrs. Webster looked up coldly. "What she feeling bad about?"

"W'y, she's had to sell all her chickens. They was botherin' some o' her neighbors — that Mis' Burmeister, I guess! She never does have a speck o' mercy on poor people! Mis' Arnspiker didn't say it was her, but I don't

b'lieve anybody else 'u'd be so all-fired mean. Go an' complain of a poor widow's layin' hens!"

There was a scarlet spot on each of Mrs. Webster's high cheek-bones. She was sewing and she did not lift her eyes. When the silence became oppressive, she said, grimly — "Is Mis' Arnspiker so offul poor?"

"My, yaas. That's all she's had to make a livin' off of — them hens o' her'n. I don't see what she'll do. She does take in a little wash, but she ain't able to take in enough to keep a flea alive — little, sickly thing! She's alwus havin' a felon. I've see her up an' a-washin' at four o'clock in the mornin' — "

"Four o'clock in the morning!" Mrs. Webster would have grasped at any straw to turn the conversation. "*You!* For mercy's sake! D' you git up so early?"

"No, but I was awake. I see her out the window. Four o'clock's my coughin'-time. I feel offul sorry for her. The way she did set store by them chickens! I've see her call 'em up, one at a time, in her lap to eat out o' her hand. An' that little brown hen — she just *loved* her! The tears fairly run down her cheeks when she tell me about sellin' 'em."

"Hunh!" said Mrs. Webster, dryly.

"I should think that Mis' Burmeister 'u'd be

ashamed o' herself," continued Mrs. Worstel. "A body with a fine house an' comf'table off! Them that don't have any mercy on the poor needn't to expect none."

"Hunh!" said Mrs. Webster. After a little she added, weakly — "Well, I guess that she didn't want her neighbor's chickens a-ruminating in her strawberry patch. I guess she didn't want that her berries should be all et up."

"Oh, my! She'd best be buyin' her berries from poor people's raisin', instid o' raisin' her own here in town, just to save a few cents — "

She stopped abruptly. A deep color spread over her face. Her wandering eyes had fallen upon Mrs. Webster's strawberry patch down in the corner of the yard.

"Pfew!" she said, moving her chair a little. "How warm it's a-gittin'! . . . Well, it's mighty hard to be a widow an' sickly at that, an' then have your only means o' support took away from you by a complainin' neighbor."

Mrs. Webster cleared her throat. Her face took on a hard look.

"Well," she said, slowly, "I don't just agree with you, Mis' Worstel. It's ag'in the law to keep chickens in town, unless you keep 'em shet up. I don't see 's Mis' Arnspiker has got any

call to go around a-talking about her neighbors because she had to git red o' her 'n."

"Mercy! She wa'n't complainin', Mis' Webster. She never said a word — not a single, breathin' word — ag'in anybody. She never even told me who it were that made a fuss. That's what made me feel so — the meek way she took it in. She said she knew it were ag'in the law, an' it wa'n't right for her to be a bother an' a aggravation to her neighbors, anyhow — but that didn't make her feel it any the lesser to give 'em up. Said she knew most people 'u'd *laff* at the idy o' her a-feelin' so about a passel o' hens, but that most people wa'n't all alone in the world, an' poor as Job's turkey at that, an' so they didn't git their affections set on dumb animals like her 'n had got. She cried as if her heart was broke. The tears just *run* down her cheeks. She kep' sayin' she didn't see how she could git along 'ithout her chickens, 'specially that little brown hen. She ust to follow Mis' Arnspiker all over. . . . I must go. How the afternoon has went. I've enjoyed myself, I declare. Oh, has Mis' Riley's son got an ear?"

"Has he got a — *what?*"

"An ear — has he got an ear?"

"An *ear!*"

"Yes, an ear. Has he got an ear — for music?"

"Oh," said Mrs. Webster, solemnly. "I do' know."

"Well, I see his mother's got a teacher there givin' him lessons on his catarrh. I just wondered if he had an ear. Come over an' set the afternoon with your work. My, how sweet that mount'n ba'm smells!"

Mrs. Webster walked with her guest around the house. She replied in an absent-minded way to Mrs. Worstel's extravagant praises of her bleeding-hearts and bachelor's-buttons and mourning-widows. She was lost in thought.

At the gate Mrs. Worstel paused. "Well," she said, with a long breath, "seems to me you've got everything heart could ask for."

"Who'd she sell 'em to?" asked Mrs. Webster, suddenly.

"Who? What? Oh, Mis' Arnspiker? Why, she sell 'em to Mr. Jones, right down in the next block. He's got a reg'lar lot for keepin' 'em in. Well, good day."

When her guest was out of sight, Mrs. Webster put on her sunbonnet, and went out the gate. She gave a long look down at Mrs. Arnspiker's little shabby house, with its hard, white yard and the sun blazing into its unshaded windows.

Then she turned down the street in the opposite direction.

At dusk that evening Mrs. Webster walked into Mrs. Arnspiker's back yard. She carried a box with slats across the top. Between these slats arose the brown head of a hen with two very astonished and anxious eyes.

Mrs. Arnspiker sat alone on the porch, rocking slowly in a creaking chair. "Why, Mis' Webster!" she exclaimed. She stood up. Mrs. Webster set the box down at her feet.

"Here's your brown hen," she announced, without a change of countenance. "I've bought all your chickens back. The man'll bring the rest of 'em to-morrow. I had to pay once ag'in what you got for 'em, but I'd of paid three times ag'in but what I'd of had 'em!"

"Oh — Mis' — Webster —"

"Well, now, don't go to crying over a *hen!* You let your chickens run. We'll put some wire-netting atop o' our fence an' keep 'em out."

She half turned to go, and then stopped. "I'm sorry I acted up so over them chickens," she said, speaking very fast. "But the neighbors have just made a reg'lar Jezebel out o' me — a-prying an' a-spying."

She walked out of the yard before Mrs. Arnspiker could reply. Mr. Webster met her at the door. "W'y, Mari'," he said, mildly, "where you been?"

"Now, don't meddle," she retorted, sharply; but at once repented, and added in a conciliatory tone—"Mis' Worstel thinks Mis' Riley's little boy has got an ear. He's a-taking lessons on the catarrh."

THE LIGHT THAT CAME TO ABRAHAM

THE LIGHT THAT CAME TO ABRAHAM

"Abraham!"

"Yes, mother."

"*A*-braham!"

"Yes, mother."

"Oh, here you are. W'y — how long should you say she's been staying here?"

Abraham lifted himself in his wheel-chair. He was thirty years old, but he was a cripple. He would never be other than a boy to his mother. A red flush went quickly across his pale face.

"She came on the fifteenth of April, mother. She got here just at six o'clock. I remember how the sunset looked on her hair."

"What silliness! Who cares how sunset looks on hair? You're just like a girl!" Abraham winced. "Well, this is the first of September. I want you should count up how much she owes us at thirty dollar a month. She wanted to pay by the month, but I didn't want the money layin' around the house all summer. Now, I'll take an' use it to buy cattle. How much is it, you say?"

"A hundred and thirty-five dollars."

Mrs. Buck drew a breath of relief. "How board does amount up. Maybe she'll offer to pay interest. She can if she's suffering to. How's your back feel?"

"It's better."

"Better? Oh, you always say you're better. I wish you'd get in an' complain sometimes, like other people. It wouldn't make a body feel so! It makes a body feel awful to see you just set around an' suffer, an' keep saying you're better. I notice *I* complain if I don't get more 'n a wart on my thumb!"

Abraham smiled.

"She's going to-morrow," said his mother, suddenly.

"She—*what?*" Abraham turned white. His eyes flashed a startled, terrified look at his mother.

"She's going to-morrow. Her husband telegrafted for her; she just got it. A hundred an' thirty-five dollar, did you say? My land! have you got a chill? You're as white as a sheet."

"I'm all right," said Abraham; but he wheeled his chair around, so his mother could not see his face.

Mrs. Buck arose with her usual sigh. There are women who never leave a chair without a

sigh. "Well, that bread must be up, ready for the oven. Anything you want, Abraham?"

"No, mother."

She went out slowly. "A hundred an' thirty-five dollar," she said, solemnly, as she closed the door. "It'll buy three Jersey heifers."

When she had put the great loaves of bread into the oven, she went out on the porch and sat down in a low wooden rocker. "I ain't so awful sorry she's going. It's some work to keep a city boarder. It makes a body hump hisself. My land! how Abraham'll miss her an' that banjo-playing of her 'n. I never see him enjoy anything so! I never see him look so bright an' gleeb as he's looked this summer. The poor boy! Just to think how he's set in that chair for thirty year, an' never had a thing to do but read. Here, she's learned him to play three pieces on her banjo. He never'd of learned if it hadn't of been for her coming here. He never'd of thought of it. He plays that 'Spanish Fidalgo' most as well as she does. He'll go an' forget it, though, without anything to practice on. I've always felt kind of condemned because I won't let him have a dog, an' him alone so, without a soul to talk to when I'm at work — but a dog *is* a nuisance, around. Abraham never complains none; but if a dog runs up an' wags his tail an' looks as if

he was saying 'Ain't you lonesome' to him, I declare I don't get over the look in Abraham's eyes in a hurry. Well, she's been terrible nice to him. They do say there's enough stories about her in town an' that's what she come an' buried herself alive for out here in the kentry all summer; but all is, if them stories is true there's them that don't have any stories told about them that might learn kindness of her. There's a plenty that says them pink cheeks of her 'n ain't natural, but the Lord knows I've hunted her bureau drawers faithful when she's been out, an' I never found any roosh anywheres. They're mighty pretty, anyhow. I never see Abraham look at anybody the way he looks at her. He can't seem to keep his eyes off of her. I never see him look at any girl that way. She looks at him a good deal, too. The first night she was here she says — 'Your son's got a soul in his eyes.' I wonder what she meant by that. There ain't a girl in the hull neighborhood but what's run after him, cripple an' all, for them black eyes of his 'n — oh, yes! an' his money. Geese-heads! He never wanted a one of them! He never took no notice of a one of them! Just set an' said 'unh-hunh' an' 'hunh-unh,' patient as could be, while they talked an' tee-heed at him. Let their flowers lay an' wilt an' never asked to have

them put in water — but just let *her* bring him a flower! It's 'Oh, mother, won't you bring some water, quick? Get the pretty vase, mother!' . . . I bet he's terrible lonesome when she's gone. My land, I forgot the bread! Setting here, talking to myself!"

At eight o'clock that evening "she" came into the still, twilit room where Abraham sat alone, with his head bowed upon his breast. She wore a white Grecian gown that fell about her in full, soft folds. On her breast was a bunch of deep red poppies. Her reddish hair was in a heavy braid down her back. She carried her banjo in one hand.

She went straight to him and sunk upon a stool at his feet. "Abraham," she said, "I'm going home to-morrow. I shall take the early stage — so I've come to play for you once more, and say good-by."

There was a silence. Then Abraham said in a voice that sounded nothing like his own — "Not *good-by!*"

"Yes, Abraham."

"You'll — come again? Some other time?"

"I'm afraid not. He — my husband thinks we shall live abroad."

Then there was a longer silence. "Do you mean," said Abraham at last, "that I shall never see you again?"

She looked up at him in the dim light. *Was* he a boy? — or was he a man? "That is what I mean," she said, gently.

This time the silence grew so long that it wore upon her. She rested one arm across his knees, as she had often done, and touched the strings of the banjo. He laid his hand upon hers — for the first time — and stopped her.

"I want to tell you," he said, "before you play — I mightn't have strength to tell you afterward — that it's all right."

"What is, Abraham?"

"That I shouldn't see you again — ever. You're another man's wife, *and I love you!*"

"*Abraham!*"

"It's all right. It's the kind of love that don't hurt any man or any woman. I didn't know it, even, till mother told me you were going away. I don't think *he* would care if he knew — and I know God wouldn't."

"Oh, Abraham!"

"It's all right," he repeated, pressing her hand gently. "If I never see you or hear from you again, I shall still be happier than any other man on earth — just because you've been here and I love you! It's like some one had set a beau-

tiful white light in the dark for me. I never had any happiness in all my life before. I never touched a woman's hand, except mother's. I never *wanted* to. I never will again, now that I have touched yours. . . . Your hand is like your heart — as pure as a lily."

"No, no," said she. Her voice was shaking.

"Don't ever send me a picture," he went on; "I have you in my heart, and pictures are poor things. I'll never forget your voice . . . or the perfume you use . . . or the way your dress falls around you when you sit down. I'll never be lonely again as long as I live."

She put her head down on his knee. He laid his hand reverently on her hair. "How beautiful it is! I know how it looks in the sunlight and in the moonlight."

A sob came to her lips.

"Don't pity *me*," he said, quickly. "Think of me always as one unto whom a great light came in the dark."

"I'm not pitying *you*, Abraham," she said. She stood before him, drawing her hands away slowly. "I can't play now. I'll leave the banjo for you. I've meant all summer for you to have it. I'm going now."

She stooped suddenly and put her trembling lips to his forehead. "Are you *glad* I came?" she whispered.

"Am I *glad!*" he repeated — and it was as if the soul of God shone upon his face.

In the morning he found that one red poppy-petal had fallen from her breast. He picked it up and laid it away, as a sacred thing, between the leaves of his Bible. Then a thought came to him. He opened the book to see what line it was resting upon. And this was it: *But Mary stood without . . . weeping. . . .*

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